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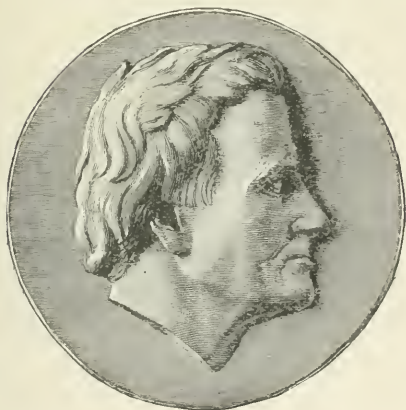


# ESSAYS FROM DE QUINCEY

EDITED BY

J. H. FOWLER, M.A.

ASSISTANT-MASTER AT CLIFTON COLLEGE ;  
AUTHOR OF ' A MANUAL OF ESSAY-WRITING '



LONDON

ADAM AND CHARLES BLACK

1900

*No soul heroic tempered to fine steel—  
No Milton's passionate striving for the best—  
Small "Druid wight," fit subject for a jest  
In thy queer garb, a feckless ne'er-do-weel.  
And yet we love thee for that wisful gaze,  
That sense of kinship with earth's outcast lives,  
Heart of the child, such sympathy as gives  
A crown supreme to many a royal phrase.*

*Thine was the love of England ; thine no less  
Our Wordsworth's love of mountain, wood, and lake ;  
Poet of prose, in whose enchanted lines  
(Virgilian magic) far strange echoes wake,  
Nature's own voice to still life's barren stress,  
Waves of the sea or wind among the pines.*





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GREENHAY, MANCHESTER.

Where De Quincey spent his early days.

[Adapted from a print drawn by George Evans "from an oil painting by Carse."]

## PREFACE

OF all English prose writers De Quincey is perhaps the best suited to awaken the first love of literature for itself. This may partly be because his faults and limitations are less obvious to youth than they are to a mature judgment. But it is also because his positive merits are of an exceptionally striking kind. His pathos and his whimsical humour, the rapidity with which he passes from one to the other, his profound sense of the mystery of life, his consciousness of a strange power in language (like the power of music) to give expression to that mystery, his own possession of that power—these things may all be trusted to lead captive the imagination of any child who possesses, in

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however small a degree, the gift that distinguished De Quincey's own childhood. To possess it as the child De Quincey did is to be endowed with the inheritance of genius. But as many more people are said to have the capacity for distinguishing sounds which we call "a musical ear" than ever learn to make use of it, so it must be with this capacity to appreciate the greatness and beauty and mystery of language.

County Councils and the British public doubtless want some more tangible result of education than "the literary sense." Meanwhile a good part of our education is still by tradition literary, and, even where the Latin and Greek classics are abandoned or excluded, honour is not unfrequently paid to literature by the inclusion of English classics in the scheme of instruction. Do those to whom it falls to give this literary teaching make the best use of their golden opportunity? Are they not often tempted, by the very real difficulties of æsthetic teaching, to teach philology and history instead, and almost everything except literature? Yet those who have acquired some measure of the literary sense themselves value it as the choicest flower or last fruit of their education. They know that it means to them something much more than a mere accomplishment, that the power to understand the immeasurable superiority of the best in literature over what is less good implies also, or may imply, the preference for what is noble and permanent over what is ignoble and transitory—the rejection of the trivial and commonplace—the awakening of the mind "from the lethargy of custom" to a knowledge of the deeper issues of life, the cleaving to "whatsoever things are true, pure, lovely, and of good

report." If those to whom literature implies all this, teach it so little, it must be because they feel the difficulties of such teaching to be insuperable, or because they dread to encourage a literary cant which they know to be as hateful as any other form of cant, religious or artistic.

The difficulties are indeed great, but "noble is the prize, and the hope is great." It is not fair, because of the difficulties, to make so little of an attempt. Of a hundred who read Cæsar and Livy, only one perhaps carries away the impression that is best worth winning from the study—an abiding sense of the character of the Roman people and their place in the history of the world. No doubt the ninety and nine get intellectual discipline in various degrees from their Latin lessons, but this choicest fruit, might it not be gained by a larger percentage than at present? Do we make enough use, in this connection, of our English classics? Surely a student here and there, at least, would win a new enthusiasm for, find a new meaning in, the splendid sentences of the Roman historian, if he knew (to take one instance) the passage in which De Quincey describes the influence of Livy upon his dreams:—

I had been in youth, and ever since, for occasional amusement, a great reader of Livy, whom I confess that I prefer, both for style and matter, to any other of the Roman historians; and I had often felt as solemn and appalling sounds, emphatically representative of Roman majesty, the two words so often occurring in Livy, *Consul Romanus*; especially when the consul is introduced in his military character. I mean to say that the words *king*, *sultan*, *regent*, etc., or any other titles of those who embody in their

own persons the collective majesty of a great people, had less power over my reverential feelings. . . . This pageant would suddenly dissolve ; and, at a clapping of hands, would be heard the heart-shaking sound of *Consul Romanus* ; and immediately came "sweeping by," in gorgeous paludaments, Paullus or Marius, girt around by a company of centurions, with the crimson tunic hoisted on a spear, and followed by the *alulaymos* of the Roman legions.

So, again, with the toil that the average learner must bestow in the often vain attempt to turn his Virgil and his Livy into respectable English prose. In nine cases out of ten he has read no English author who bears the faintest resemblance to an English prose version of either. A prose version of a poet can never reproduce all the poetry of the original, but we are agreed to demand of our pupils the impossible. At least the unattainable might be brought a little nearer if the student steeped himself in the prose of De Quincey at those moments of exaltation where, without passing the boundary line into poetry, it acquires mysterious cadences and haunting rhythms of its own, or puts into a "lonely word" the poignant pathos and unfathomed suggestiveness that we associate with the verse of Virgil. De Quincey, too, in parts of "The Revolt of the Tartars," "Joan of Arc," or elsewhere, would supply a model for the rendering into English of Livy's gorgeous periods. There are magnificent examples of similar prose in Gibbon and Macaulay, but De Quincey has more variety, if less sustained excellence, than either historian.

Once more, there is the labour of the English essay, which is so often unremunerative because the pupil

never reads anything in English that deserves the name of literature. Yet nothing is more certain than that, for most people, the only way to write good English is to read it. Little can be learnt, except by the happily constituted few who teach themselves better than they can be taught, by repeated practice in writing "out of one's own head" without direction. But much may be gained by the study, under guidance, of the prose of so careful and so masterly a writer as De Quincey; his choice of words, the structure of his sentences and his paragraphs. To read a passage and then reproduce it on paper from memory is a most valuable exercise. We may either try to reproduce it as far as possible in the words of the original, or simply aim at giving the substance in *our own* words. It is as well to try both plans, the lesson being different, but perhaps equally valuable, in the two cases. The original ought to be carefully compared with the copy, and the points of superiority in the original inquired into and noted. The mere gain in vocabulary from such a study is not to be despised. What a miserable use of his heritage of speech does the average Englishman make! How many of us are entitled to boast with Wordsworth that "we speak the tongue that Shakespeare spake"?

It remains for me to add that this edition is, in some sense, the fulfilment of a personal debt. I shall never forget the impression left upon me in childhood by the first reading of "The English Mail-Coach," and one or two of the "Analects from Richter," or the new insight into literature given me when, at the age of sixteen, I came across the "Note on the Knocking at the Gate in

Macbeth." I do not think my own experience was at all singular, but De Quincey, though acknowledged to be an English classic, is not commonly read at school, and he is often not placed in the hands of those whose mental development is just ripe for appreciating him.

Besides the general obligation under which all lovers of De Quincey lie to Professor Masson, I have to acknowledge his courtesy in allowing me to use the footnotes attached to the essays in his complete edition of De Quincey's works. In the analysis of De Quincey's style I have been helped by the late Professor Minto's *Manual of English Prose Literature*.

J. H. FOWLER.

The text is taken from the Collective Edition in 14 volumes, published by Messrs. A. and C. Black in 1896-7, to which references are made throughout. The unsigned footnotes are De Quincey's own; those signed "M" are by Professor Masson.

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DE QUINCEY'S COTTAGE AT LASSWADE.



## INTRODUCTION

### I.—LIFE OF DE QUINCEY

THOMAS DE QUINCEY, the son of a Manchester merchant, was born on 15th August 1785. He was educated first by a private tutor in Manchester, then at Bath, and then, after a tour in Ireland, at Manchester Grammar School, where he boarded in the house of the High Master. In July 1802 he ran away from school with "an English poet in one pocket, and an odd volume of Euripides in the other,"—an unusual outfit for a truant. From July to November 1802 he wandered about North Wales. Then he hid himself in London, but, becoming reconciled to his family, he entered Worcester College, Oxford, in 1803. He seems to have distinguished himself in the paper-work of his final examination, but, failing to present himself for the *viva voce* part, he left Oxford without a degree. In 1809 he went to live at Grasmere, drawn thither by the Wordsworths. In 1816 he married Margaret Simpson, daughter of a Westmoreland farmer. He had, as early as his Oxford days, acquired a taste for opium, which grew upon him until it threatened paralysis of all his mental powers; but he was happily able to overcome it to a large extent, and to turn it to extraordinary account in his first published paper of any importance—the first instalment of the "Confessions of an English Opium-Eater," which appeared in the *London Magazine* for 1821. From this date to 1830 he lived partly in London, partly at the Lakes, partly in Edinburgh; from 1830 to 1840 wholly in Edinburgh, a contributor to *Blackwood* and *Tait's Magazine*. In 1840 his wife died,

and he went to live with his children at a cottage near Lasswade, seven miles out of Edinburgh. This (though he was sometimes in lodgings at 42 Lothian Street, Edinburgh) remained his home till his death, 8th December 1859, at the age of seventy-four. A collected edition of his numerous magazine articles and other works had been brought out in America, and he had himself superintended an elaborately revised edition published in Edinburgh in fourteen volumes. The standard edition of his works, edited by Professor Masson, and published by Messrs. A. and C. Black, is contained in the same number of volumes, but includes a good deal of additional matter, brought together from various sources. The careful introductions and foot-notes with which it is furnished make it a complete history of De Quincey's writings. The story of the writer's life is best read in the *Autobiography* (Vols. I. and II. of the *Collected Writings*), in the *Confessions* (Vol. III.), and in the delightful volume which Professor Masson contributed to the series of *English Men of Letters*.

In the history of English literature De Quincey's name naturally connects itself with two different groups of men: first, with the so-called "Lake" poets, Wordsworth, Southey, and Coleridge, whose friend and neighbour he was for so long, and of whom he wrote reminiscences, highly interesting, if not always trustworthy; then with the remarkable group of critics and essayists who were chiefly responsible for the development of English periodical literature—Hazlitt, Lamb, Wilson (Christopher North), and Leigh Hunt. By his writings De Quincey belonged wholly to the second group, for he wrote no poetry; yet, as we shall see, his compositions in a certain "mode of impassioned prose" go some way towards bridging over the gulf between poetry and prose.

## II.—INTRODUCTORY NOTES TO THE SELECTED ESSAYS

### *The English Mail-Coach*

Three striking passages in the *Autobiography* illustrate the fascination which coaches, the sound of wheels, the idea of travelling, always had for De Quincey's mind. The first

is a recollection of the night on which his father came home to Greenhay to die ; it describes "the listening for hours to the sounds from horses' hoofs upon distant roads, rising and falling, caught and lost, upon the gentle undulation of such fitful airs as might be stirring," and "the sudden emerging of horses' heads from the deep gloom of the shady lane" (Chap. III.). The second (in Chap. XII., "Travelling") recalls the sensations with which, at seven years of age, he awaited his first journey. The third (in "Lake Reminiscences," Chap. VI.) speaks of his many midnight journeys in the coach from Kendal to Grasmere—the pitchy darkness and "the flying lights from our lamps as they shot into the forest recesses." No writer has given more wonderful expression to the poetry and pathos of travelling.

The origin of the three papers collectively entitled "The English Mail-Coach" is told us by De Quincey himself in his "Author's Postscript" (p. 59). "Thirty-seven years ago, or rather more," he says, writing in 1854, "accident made me, in the dead of night, and of a night memorably solemn, the solitary witness of an appalling scene, which threatened instant death in a shape the most terrific to two young people, whom I had no means of assisting, except in so far as I was able to give them a most hurried warning of their danger ; but even *that* not until they stood within the very shadow of the catastrophe, being divided from the most frightful of deaths by scarcely more, if more at all, than seventy seconds." Such, in brief outline, is the incident on which De Quincey founded his three chapters. The first chapter, "The Glory of Motion," describes the distinguishing features which, in his view, belonged to the English mail-coach service in the time of the war with Napoleon :—"1st, velocity unprecedented ; 2ndly, the power and beauty of the horses ; 3rdly, the official connection with the government of a great nation ; 4thly, the function, almost a consecrated function, of publishing and diffusing through the land the great political events, and especially the great battles, during a conflict of unparalleled grandeur." The second chapter, "The Vision of Sudden Death," begins with a discussion of the opposite points of view from which sudden death has been regarded, as a thing to be greatly desired or greatly dreaded, and passes on to

recount De Quincey's memorable night-journey by the mail-coach from Manchester to Kendal. The accident, described at length in the latter part of the chapter, took place a few miles to the south of Preston. To the third and concluding chapter De Quincey gives the name of "Dream-Fugue, founded on the preceding theme of Sudden Death." It describes a wild dream, in which the incidents of the second chapter reappear, bewilderingly distorted and worked upon by the dreaming imagination, and blended with the impressions of the power and mystery of the mail-coach service set forth in the first chapter. It boldly attempts, as its title implies, to express in words feelings that more properly find expression in music—vague tumultuous feelings of awe and infinity, of horror and suspense and relief. The extravagance of it was censured at the time of its first publication, and De Quincey attempted to justify it by saying, "If there be anything amiss, let the Dream be responsible. The Dream is a law to itself. . . . the Dream knows best, and the Dream, I say again, is the responsible party" (p. 60). This famous answer has failed to convince some readers, at least, because they cannot accept the dream, in all its details, as a real dream, even as the dream of an opium-eater. They feel that the chapter is a deliberate experiment, and must be judged as such, and that it fails because of its over-elaboration.

The second chapter is less elaborate than the third, and more successful. It goes, perhaps, quite as far as prose may venture in attempting to represent, by rhythm and choice of words, the sense of awe and tumultuous emotion. At each stage its melody, like that of some great sonata or, at least, of a lyrical ode, is responsive to the dominant feeling of the moment. Still, we are frequently recalled to the more ordinary levels of prose. We are always within hail of them, so to speak, and therefore we do not feel that prose is being put to an illegitimate use—made to do something for which it is not fitted.

#### *Joan of Arc*

The first impression left by this fantastic essay may be a little bewildering. De Quincey opens in a strain of the loftiest "impassioned prose." Presently he is poking M

Michelet in the ribs, or passing pleasantries on the subject of sailors in the British Navy darning their own stockings. Was ever such a medley? A second reading will clear up a good deal of the confusion, and, if it does not convince the reader that De Quincey was justified in all his digressions, it will make abundantly clear the fact that we have here a piece of English prose that is in part magnificent, in part illuminating, and everywhere full of interest. There is consummate method in the madness, if madness there be; and the art with which the paragraphs are linked together is worthy of special study, though the discursiveness of the essay is the privilege of genius, not to be imitated by ordinary mortals.

We may indeed be disposed to complain that De Quincey has not utilised to the full the possibilities of Joan's wonderful story. Why does he not give us the vision of the Archangel Michael and "the pity in heaven for the fair realm of France"? Why does he give us no picture of Joan with lance in hand, "armée de toutes pièces, sauf la tête"? Why does he leave out her reply to the theologians, "There is more in the books of our Lord than in yours"? For these and some other things we could well have spared any number of pleasantries. Yet, when all deductions are made, these few pages do more than many pages of a less imaginative writer to give us a vivid impression of the times in which Joan lived and their significance in the history of the world, as well as of the girlhood and sudden elevation of the maid of Orleans, her character and achievement and tragic doom.

#### *Infant Literature*

There is no more charming account to be found anywhere of the first strong literary impressions made on the mind of one who was afterwards to write literature himself. We may compare Coleridge's reminiscences of his Christ's Hospital days in the first chapter of the *Biographia Literaria*, but those refer to later boyhood. For parallels to De Quincey's wonderfully vivid recollections of his childhood we should rather go to R. L. Stevenson (in the *Child's Garden of Verses*, and *Memories and Portraits*), to Emile Souvestre (in *Un Philosophe sous les Toits*), and Pierre Loti. Those who like

this chapter should read more of De Quincey's *Autobiography*, especially the chapter entitled "First Introduction to the World of Strife," with its humorous account of the tyranny practised upon the youthful De Quincey by his masterful brother William, and the equally delightful pages which recount the strange and adventurous boyhood of "My Brother Pink."

*On the Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth*

The best commentary on this wonderfully profound and suggestive criticism is the following passage from *Guesses at Truth*.

"When a subtle critic has detected some recondite beauty in Shakespeare, the vulgar are fain to cry that Shakespeare did not mean it. Well! what of that? If it be there, his genius meant it. This is the very mark whereby to know a true poet. There will always be a number of beauties in his works, which he never meant to put into them.

"This is one of the resemblances between the works of Genius and those of Nature, a resemblance betokening that the powers which produce them are akin. Each, beside its immediate, apparent purpose, is ever connected by certain delicate and almost imperceptible fibres, by numberless ties of union and communion, and the sweet intercourse of giving and receiving, with the universe of which it forms a part. Hereby the poet shows that he is not a mere 'child of Time, But offspring of the Eternal Prime.' His works are not narrowed to the climes and seasons, the manners and thoughts that give birth to them, but spread out their invisible arms through time and space, and, when generations, and empires, and even religions have passed away, still stand in unwaning freshness and truth."

This particular scene in *Macbeth* has not always received the commendations of the critics. The Cambridge editors regard it as un-Shakespearean. Schiller, adapting the tragedy for representation at Weimar in 1800, substituted a lofty morning hymn as more edifying. But De Quincey's explanation should convince us. It has also the merit of supplying a key to the right appreciation of many other things in great literature.

*Early Memorials of Grasmere*

This beautiful paper hardly requires any words of introduction ; it is sufficiently recommended by its own simplicity and touching pathos. Early in life De Quincey passed under the spell of Wordsworth. This poet could not fail to stir in the souls of all who came under his influence a deep sympathy with Nature and with those who pass their lives in the closest contact with Nature ; and the "Memorials of Grasmere" show us how completely De Quincey had caught his teacher's special sympathy with the loveliness and terror of Nature as revealed in the lonely valleys and mountains of the English Lakes, and with the lives and characters of the peasantry who inhabit that district. In its turn this prose idyll may furnish for some modern readers the fittest introduction to Wordsworth's pastoral poetry, to his simple elegies, to stories like *Michael*, and to parts of *The Prelude* and *The Excursion*.

*Dream upon the Universe*

The imaginativeness of the original, and the beauty of the translation, are a sufficient apology for the inclusion of Richter's famous Dream in this selection. For students of De Quincey's style it has a special interest as being one of the models which De Quincey undoubtedly followed in the composition of those "dream-fantasies" which are the best-known examples of his "prose poetry." He was so much impressed by this particular Dream that, years after he had made the translation here printed, he wrote another version from memory. This will be found in Vol. VIII. of the Collected Writings at the end of a paper on "The System of the Heavens as revealed by Lord Rosse's Telescope."

## III.—DE QUINCEY'S PROSE STYLE

After an analytical lecture on Handel's *Messiah*, in the course of which the musician took the themes that enter into the choruses and played them, in their simplest form, on the piano, one of the audience was heard saying to another : "No doubt it was all very good, but somehow I feel as if I had

been assisting at the dissection of an old and valued friend."

Some genuine lovers of literature will feel the same impatience with any attempt to analyse its beauties, and will dislike being invited to examine the "structure of paragraphs" or to label the "qualities of style." Yet no one who has studied the careful sketches of clouds and rocks in the plates of the third and fourth volumes of *Modern Painters* has appreciated Turner's gorgeous paintings the less for having gained an idea of the infinite toil of preparation that precedes artistic achievement; and probably no one will love these great masterpieces of literature the less for having taken the trouble to form some notion of the reasons *why* they are great, and of the way in which they have been built up. On the contrary, our pleasure becomes the more intense as it becomes more intelligent. We grow more sensitive of defects, more intolerant of tricks and cheap successes, but the greatest art is so immeasurably great that the further we see into it the more we find to move our admiration. De Quincey, it may be added, was so much of a deliberate artist—he had so fine an ear, and he cared so much for saying what he had to say in the best possible manner—that the study of his methods is instructive in an unusual degree.

1. *Vocabulary*.—He has a great command of words, and takes them from all sources. He often chooses *unfamiliar* words to gain greater dignity for a situation by removing it more completely from ordinary associations, *e.g.* he prefers "umbrageous" to "shady" (p. 44), "torsion" to "twisting" (p. 48). The same reason, and the desire to gain a stately, sonorous rhythm, account for his love of *Latin and Greek derivatives*. Generally the desire justifies itself; it is not often that, in choosing long words, he falls into so essentially commonplace a sentence as "Suffer me to recall before your mind the circumstances of that unparalleled situation" (p. 48). He is also fond of *technical terms*, *e.g.* "quartering" (p. 43), "syncope" (p. 112), and of words confined to a particular district or profession, *e.g.* "scaled" (p. 122), "bield" (p. 124).

2. *Sentences*.—De Quincey's sentences tend to be long rather than short, complex rather than simple. Of the two



kinds of long complex sentence he prefers the *periodic*, in which the sense is not completed until the end of the sentence, to the *loose*, in which qualifying clauses are "tacked on" to the end of the principal clause. But like all good writers he avoids the monotony of forming many successive sentences on one pattern. This rule of variety is only broken when special emphasis is sought by repetition, *e.g.* "She interposed to protect the captive or the wounded; she mourned over the excesses of her countrymen; she threw herself off her horse to kneel by the dying English soldier, and to comfort him with such ministrations, physical or spiritual, as his situation allowed" (p. 80). Here there is an obvious reason for assimilating the three sentences to each other; but even here monotony is avoided by the clause which is added to the third. In such a narrative as "The Vision of Sudden Death" the length of the sentences is managed with great art. At first the strange calm that rests on the road is reflected in the steady march of the sentences. The movement of some of them is peculiarly slow, rhythmical, majestic; note especially those beginning "The county was," "At this particular" (p. 41), "Whatever we may swear" (p. 42). Observe the smoothness of the sentence that describes the smooth running of the coach on the sandy margin of the road (cf. for the onomatopœic effect, Virgil's line describing the galloping of horses, *Aen.* viii. 596). For a similar but still more wonderful effect, study the three separate parts of the sentence, "It stole . . ." (p. 42). Presently the calm is succeeded by agitation, which is naturally expressed by short, broken sentences, and especially by interposed questions. The varied emotions of the helpless opium-shattered spectator of approaching tragedy, the swift flight of the precious moments, the swifter flight of thought anticipating the crisis, all have their appropriate reflection in the rhythm. Each reader can follow the changes for himself. If any one feels that such analysis of the movement of the piece is over-elaborate, he should remember (1) that it is not asserted or supposed that in every case the correspondence is conscious. The natural instinct of any good writer would guide him right in such matters; but this unconscious choice of the right mode of narration does not make the study of what has

been rightly written less useful. (2) That De Quincey *à la* study carefully the effect of rhythm in his sentences is proved by the alterations he made in them, *e.g.* "We ran past them faster than ever mill-race in our inexorable flight," was the original form of one sentence. Why did he change it to the form which it now bears (p. 47)? Because, as Dr. Masson says, of his "sensitiveness to fit sound at such a moment of wild rapidity." We may add that his ear, so delicate in such matters that he could not tolerate the expression "master-builder," would certainly dislike the close neighbourhood of "past" and "faster" in the first draft of the sentence.

A favourite method of securing variety in the construction of sentences together with emphasis, carried a little to excess by De Quincey, is by an *inversion* of the natural order of words. A predicate is put before its subject, or an adverbial clause comes first, *e.g.* "Enemies it was that made the difference between their subsequent fortunes" (p. 63), "Gorgeous were the lilies of France" (p. 64), "Continually she showed that their interrogations were irrelevant" (p. 82), "Obliquely upon our left we were nearing the sea" (p. 41).

Notable also, not always to be imitated, is De Quincey's affection for the *parenthesis*. A fine example of its skilful use is the sentence in "Joan of Arc" (p. 70), in which a parenthesis fully relates an exciting incident. Another beautiful instance is in the opening sentence of the last paragraph of the same essay (p. 92).

3. *Paragraphs*.—De Quincey himself wrote: "The two capital secrets in the art of prose composition are these: 1st, the philosophy of transition and connection: 2ndly, the way in which sentences are made to modify each other, for the most powerful effects in written eloquence arise out of this reverberation, as it were, from each other in a rapid succession of sentences." He studied these two secrets with great care in his own writing. We may note: (1) Each paragraph forms a *rounded whole*, within which the sentences are closely interdependent. (2) Each marks a *separate stage* in the progress of the narrative. (3) The *opening* sentence is not a mere link to the preceding paragraph; it attracts the attention of the reader, calls it away perhaps from the train of thought to which the preceding sentence may have led.

(4) The *closing* sentence of the paragraph is nearly always one of special impressiveness ; so, indeed, it ought to be, because we linger over it in the natural pause between two paragraphs.

(5) De Quincey is famous for his *digressions*, which sometimes lead him far from the subject in hand, but which he always links to the context with great skill.

4. *Figures of Speech*.—(1) Few writers are so full of *real* metaphors. What is called “fine writing” abounds in half-realised metaphors, often incongruous and always stale. De Quincey’s metaphors and similes, on the contrary, call up fresh and living pictures to the mind. (2) We may note the *varied sources* from which he draws them—music, mathematics, literature, sport, and, above all, the grander phenomena of nature. (3) In his more poetical passages the *dignity* of the similes is worthy of remark : he elevates the whole subject by their means. (4) A very common form of metaphor is *personification*, especially the treating of abstractions as if they were human agents—the curse of labour *masters* the bodies of men, the aspirations of man’s heart *travel*, the hurricane of flight and pursuit *hunts* the county up and down (all on p. 41).

5. *Qualities of Style*.—Reserving for consideration in a separate chapter De Quincey’s most famous achievement, his development of a special kind of poetic prose, we may pass in rapid review some leading qualities of his style.

*Discursiveness*, the disposition to roam capriciously from one part of a subject to another; the refusal to handle a theme in a systematic, accurate, logical, scientific manner, is characteristic of the literary English essay throughout its history. De Quincey’s essays differ in a good many ways from the eighteenth century essays of Addison and Johnson, but in this respect he fully maintains the tradition. Had he lived in the eighteenth century his writings would probably have taken the form of a periodical essay on the plan of the *Spectator* and *Rambler*. Living in the nineteenth century instead, he fell in with a different literary fashion, and became the prince of magazine writers. One way in which this characteristic shows itself is in the use of parentheses, already mentioned ; but whole paragraphs in his essays might often be described as parenthetical.

Closely allied to this quality, but not identical with it, is one to which we may give the name of *Leisureliness*. He is never in a hurry to make his point; we must be content to bide his time. In "The Glory of Motion" how many things must we listen to before we come to the real subject—the journey by the coach that carries the news of a great victory; and even when the moment for starting seems to have arrived (p. 24) we must wait till we have learnt the details of the daily cleaning of the coach. This quality, so notable in some of the older novelists, in Sir Walter Scott and Jane Austen, even in Mrs. Gaskell, seems almost to have disappeared from the writing of the present day. It is only a virtue when what is given us by the way is sufficiently good to be worth dwelling on. But the contrast which this manner of writing presents to the hurry and impatience of their own age is not the least of the benefits which modern readers will get from turning to it occasionally.

Of the greater qualities, *Humour*, *Imagination*, *Pathos*, on the possession of which De Quincey's claim to be a classic must finally rest, little needs to be said. Each reader must feel their presence for himself. When De Quincey is ranked among the English humourists, it is generally because of his two papers "On Murder considered as one of the Fine Arts." The germ of these papers may be found in some remarks in the "Note on the Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth" (p. 110). But parts of the "Autobiography" and the "Lake Reminiscences" abound in delicious humour, and there is at least one admirable example in "The English Mail-Coach" (p. 10). The "little Druid wight," as he has been called, fairly bubbles over with fun; and in gratitude for so much infectious hilarity we may forgive a certain "button-hole facetiousness" to which he occasionally condescends. *Imagination* of a high poetic order shows itself not merely in his wild "dream-fantasies" but in his metaphors and similes everywhere. It is imagination, too, which gives value to the criticism in the "Knocking at the Gate" and to the history in his "Joan of Arc." *Pathos* is the supreme quality of his "prose poetry." He is full of the tenderest pity for "all the troubles of all the people on the face of the earth," but especially of pity for the unpitied everywhere, those who have been cast out from the society of

their fellows. Dr. Masson has well noted the importance of the word "pariah" in De Quincey's vocabulary, the deep feeling with which he uses it (pp. 5, 99). The quickening of this sympathy in his readers is perhaps the highest of all the services that De Quincey has it in his power to render.

#### IV.—POETIC PROSE

The most interesting literary problem in connection with De Quincey is presented by his use of that "mode of impassioned prose" which he considered himself to have invented, and which he certainly developed in a very special degree.

Poetry differs from prose (1) by the obvious difference that it appeals to the ear by a measured rhythm, and, if it is in rhyme, by the regular recurrence of similar sounds, (2) by a deeper difference more difficult to explain—by its relation to ourselves and the outside world. The objects of prose are the objects of ordinary speech—to describe, narrate, explain, argue, persuade. Poetry *suggests* more than it actually expresses. If it is descriptive, it gives to that which it describes

The light that never was on sea or land,  
The consecration and the poet's dream.

It makes us realise that there is more in the world than the first obvious aspects of things. It finds expression for, and so heightens, our sense of mystery, of the infinite, of the spiritual.

By "poetic prose" or "prose-poetry," then, is meant prose that, without ceasing to be prose, aims at producing the effects of poetry—at affecting the reader by means of rhythm and alliteration and by the subtler influences indicated above. A fine example is to be found in the sentences in which De Quincey describes how he stood, when a child, in the death-chamber of his little sister:—

"I stood checked for a moment; awe, not fear, fell upon me; and, whilst I stood, a solemn wind began to blow, the saddest that ear ever heard. It was a wind that might have swept the fields of mortality for a thousand centuries."

How close this is to poetry may be shown, if necessary, by a simple experiment. A very slight alteration would turn the passage into blank verse.

And, whilst I stood, a solemn wind began  
To blow, the saddest that ear ever heard.  
It was a wind that might have swept the fields  
Of death for (full) a thousand centuries.

The question may at once be asked, Is such writing of "prose-poetry" legitimate? Ought not poetry to be poetry and prose to be prose? To this we may answer: (1) The test of the legitimacy of the art is its success. If De Quincey, who was not a poet, and presumably did not feel himself capable of succeeding in poetry, produces the pleasurable effects of poetry upon his readers, it is pedantic to quarrel with his method. Doubtless there are some readers who are only repelled by this kind of prose; but it will generally be found that they are readers who do not care for poetry either. (2) The literary perfection of some prose translations of poetry—above all, of the Authorised Version of the poetical books of the Old Testament—forms a strong argument in favour of poetic prose.<sup>1</sup> The rhythm is prose rhythm, but it is singularly close to poetry. Hexameters, for instance, are fairly frequent, as "God is gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet." (3) It is interesting to compare with this "prose-poetry" the poetry of Walt Whitman, which was written under the theory that metre is a trammel, and that a poet ought only to be guided by instinctive rhythm. The significant fact about his poetry is that, just when it is most truly poetical in spirit, most elevated, it is also, though unconsciously, most obedient to the laws of metre. This is specially noticeable in his fine poem on the death of Abraham Lincoln:

O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done,  
The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is won,  
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,  
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring:

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<sup>1</sup> We might even plead that Hebrew poetry itself, which knows neither rhyme nor fixed metre, is identical with poetic prose. The "parallelism," which is the great feature of Hebrew poetry, may often be found in English prose-poetry.

But O heart ! heart ! heart !  
 O the bleeding drops of red,  
 Where on the deck my Captain lies,  
 Fallen cold and dead.

Now exactly the same thing is to be observed in the poetic prose of De Quincey and Ruskin. Where the exaltation above ordinary prose is greatest, there the metrical approximation to poetry is closest.<sup>1</sup> We see this (*e.g.*) in Ruskin's *Modern Painters*. Opening at the wonderful chapter on "The Two Boyhoods," one reads this poetical description of the earth as Turner found it (only in Ruskin the lines are printed as prose):

Full shone now its awful globe,  
 One pallid charnel-house,—a ball strewn bright  
 With human ashes, glaring in poised sway  
 Beneath the sun,  
 All blinding-white with death from pole to pole.

The conclusion from these examples would seem to be that, interesting as are these experiments on the border line of the two arts, and successful as they have been in the hands of men of genius, yet as a general rule poetry ought to be poetry and prose ought to be prose. With regard to the imitation of this species of prose it has been well said (Abbott and Seeley, *English Lessons for English People*, p. 98) that "a beginner who wants to write poetic prose wishes to succeed where only a few men of genius have tried, and only a few of those few have succeeded."

There is, however, one purpose for which it becomes almost necessary to attempt the impossible. If we try to translate into English prose a poet like Virgil, the charm of whose poetry depends largely on subtle rhythmical effects, the use of dignified and sonorous words, and so forth, we must either be content to lose almost all the charm, or we must seek to give our prose some of the qualities that De Quincey gave to his. The same thing applies to the attempt

<sup>1</sup> It is not maintained that these disguised verse-rhythms are the excellence of poetic prose. On the contrary, they are its characteristic defect. But the tendency to use them is strongest at the points where the prose is most poetic. On the whole, the most completely successful passages of poetic prose, both in De Quincey and Ruskin, are those in which this tendency, though distinctly felt, has been resisted.

to translate the poetic prose of a modern writer like Richter. Success is probably unattainable; but the study of De Quincey will bring us somewhat nearer the goal.

As to De Quincey's claim to have invented a special "mode of impassioned prose," it should be said that examples are to be found in seventeenth century prose, notably in Sir T. Browne's "Urn-Burial," of a very similar poetic eloquence. The example of the Authorised Version of the Bible has already been mentioned. De Quincey himself refers to the profound literary impression left upon his mind in childhood by the sentence, "Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords" (p. 100). He was influenced most strongly and most directly by Richter, whose "dream-fantasies" doubtless suggested his own treatment of dreams in the *Confessions*, the *Autobiography*, and the *English Mail-Coach*. No previous English writer had sought these effects with the same deliberation as De Quincey. At their best, his achievements in this kind rank among the glories of English prose. They have only been surpassed by the most splendid passages in Ruskin, which have this advantage over De Quincey's — that they generally form the climax of a "high argument." In De Quincey the contrast is occasionally obtrusive between the "purple patch" and a trivial context; in Ruskin the discourse, full throughout of a high ethical purpose, deepens naturally into poetry as the chapter draws to a solemn or impassioned rhythmic close.



## THE ENGLISH MAIL-COACH<sup>1</sup>

### SECTION I—THE GLORY OF MOTION

SOME twenty or more years before I matriculated at Oxford, Mr. Palmer, at that time M.P. for Bath, had accomplished two things, very hard to do on our little planet, the Earth, however cheap they may be held by eccentric people in comets: he had invented mail-coaches, and he had married the daughter of a duke.<sup>2</sup> He was, therefore, just twice as

<sup>1</sup> In October 1849 there appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine* an article entitled "*The English Mail-Coach, or the Glory of Motion.*" There was no intimation that it was to be continued; but in December 1849 there followed in the same magazine an article in two sections, headed by a paragraph explaining that it was by the author of the previous article in the October number, and was to be taken in connexion with that article. One of the sections of this second article was entitled "*The Vision of Sudden Death,*" and the other "*Dream-Fugue on the above theme of Sudden Death.*" When De Quincey revised the papers in 1854 for republication in volume iv of the Collective Edition of his writings, he brought the whole under the one general title of "*The English Mail-Coach,*" dividing the text, as at present, into three sections or chapters, the first with the sub-title *The Glory of Motion*, the second with the sub-title *The Vision of Sudden Death*, and the third with the sub-title *Dream-Fugue, founded on the preceding theme of Sudden Death.* Great care was bestowed on the revision. Passages that had appeared in the magazine articles were omitted; new sentences were inserted; and the language was retouched throughout.—M.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. John Palmer, a native of Bath, and from about 1768 the energetic proprietor of the Theatre Royal in that city, had been led, by the wretched state in those days of the means of intercommunication between Bath and London, and his own consequent difficulties in arranging for a punctual succession of good actors at his theatre, to turn his attention to the improvement of the whole system of Post-

great a man as Galileo, who did certainly invent (or, which is the same thing,<sup>1</sup> discover) the satellites of Jupiter, those very next things extant to mail-coaches in the two capital pretensions of speed and keeping time, but, on the other hand, who did *not* marry the daughter of a duke.

These mail-coaches, as organised by Mr. Palmer, are entitled to a circumstantial notice from myself, having had so large a share in developing the anarchies of my subsequent dreams: an agency which they accomplished, 1st, through velocity at that time unprecedented—for they first revealed the glory of motion; 2dly, through grand effects for the eye between lamp-light and the darkness upon solitary roads; 3dly, through animal beauty and power so often displayed in the class of horses selected for this mail service; 4thly,

Office conveyance, and of locomotive machinery generally, in the British Islands. The result was a scheme for superseding, on the great roads at least, the then existing system of sluggish and irregular stage-coaches, the property of private persons and companies, by a new system of government coaches, in connexion with the Post-Office, carrying the mails, and also a regulated number of passengers, with clock-work precision, at a rate of comparative speed, which he hoped should ultimately be not less than ten miles an hour. The opposition to the scheme was, of course, enormous; coach-proprietors, inn-keepers, the Post-Office officials themselves, were all against Mr. Palmer; he was voted a crazy enthusiast and a public bore. Pitt, however, when the scheme was submitted to him, recognised its feasibility; on the 8th of August 1784 the first mail-coach on Mr. Palmer's plan started from London at 8 o'clock in the morning and reached Bristol at 11 o'clock at night; and from that day the success of the new system was assured.—Mr. Palmer himself, having been appointed Surveyor and Comptroller-General of the Post-Office, took rank as an eminent and wealthy public man, M.P. for Bath and what not, and lived till 1818. De Quincey makes it one of his distinctions that he “had married the daughter of a duke”; and in a footnote to that paragraph he gives the lady's name as “Lady Madeline Gordon.” From an old Debrett, however, I learn that Lady Madelina Gordon, second daughter of Alexander, fourth Duke of Gordon, was first married, on the 3d of April 1789, to Sir Robert Sinclair, Bart., and next, on the 25th of November 1805, to *Charles Palmer, of Lockley Park, Berks, Esq.* If Debrett is right, her second husband was not the John Palmer of Mail-Coach celebrity, and De Quincey is wrong.—M.

<sup>1</sup> “*The same thing*”:—Thus, in the calendar of the Church Festivals, the discovery of the true cross (by Helen, the mother of Constantine) is recorded (and, one might think, with the express consciousness of sarcasm) as the *Invention* of the Cross.

through the conscious presence of a central intellect, that, in the midst of vast distances<sup>1</sup>—of storms, of darkness, of danger—overruled all obstacles into one steady co-operation to a national result. For my own feeling, this post-office service spoke as by some mighty orchestra, where a thousand instruments, all disregarding each other, and so far in danger of discord, yet all obedient as slaves to the supreme *baton* of some great leader, terminate in a perfection of harmony like that of heart, brain, and lungs in a healthy animal organisation. But, finally, that particular element in this whole combination which most impressed myself, and through which it is that to this hour Mr. Palmer's mail-coach system tyrannises over my dreams by terror and terrific beauty, lay in the awful *political* mission which at that time it fulfilled. The mail-coach it was that distributed over the face of the land, like the opening of apocalyptic vials, the heart-shaking news of Trafalgar, of Salamanca, of Vittoria, of Waterloo.<sup>2</sup> These were the harvests that, in the grandeur of their reaping, redeemed the tears and blood in which they had been sown. Neither was the meanest peasant so much below the grandeur and the sorrow of the times as to confound battles such as these, which were gradually moulding the destinies of Christendom, with the vulgar conflicts of ordinary warfare, so often no more than gladiatorial trials of national prowess. The victories of England in this stupendous contest rose of themselves as natural *Te Deums* to heaven; and it was felt by the thoughtful that such victories, at such a crisis of general prostration, were not more beneficial to ourselves than finally to France, our enemy, and to the nations of all western or central Europe, through whose pusillanimity it was that the French domination had prospered.

The mail-coach, as the national organ for publishing these mighty events, thus diffusively influential, became itself a spiritualised and glorified object to an impassioned heart;

<sup>1</sup> "*Vast distances*":—One case was familiar to mail-coach travellers where two mails in opposite directions, north and south, starting at the same minute from points six hundred miles apart, met almost constantly at a particular bridge which bisected the total distance.

<sup>2</sup> Battle of Trafalgar, Nelson's last victory, 21st October 1805; Battle of Salamanca, 22d July 1812; Battle of Vittoria, 21st June 1813; Battle of Waterloo, 18th June 1815.—M.

and naturally, in the Oxford of that day, *all* hearts were impassioned, as being all (or nearly all) in *early* manhood. In most universities there is one single college; in Oxford there were five-and-twenty, all of which were peopled by young men, the *élite* of their own generation; not boys, but men: none under eighteen. In some of these many colleges the custom permitted the student to keep what are called "short terms"; that is, the four terms of Michaelmas, Lent, Easter, and Act, were kept by a residence, in the aggregate, of ninety-one days, or thirteen weeks. Under this interrupted residence, it was possible that a student might have a reason for going down to his home four times in the year. This made eight journeys to and fro. But, as these homes lay dispersed through all the shires of the island, and most of us disdained all coaches except his majesty's mail, no city out of London could pretend to so extensive a connexion with Mr. Palmer's establishment as Oxford. Three mails, at the least, I remember as passing every day through Oxford, and benefiting by my personal patronage—viz. the Worcester, the Gloucester, and the Holyhead mail. Naturally, therefore, it became a point of some interest with us, whose journeys revolved every six weeks on an average, to look a little into the executive details of the system. With some of these Mr. Palmer had no concern; they rested upon bye-laws enacted by posting-houses for their own benefit, and upon other bye-laws, equally stern, enacted by the inside passengers for the illustration of their own haughty exclusiveness. These last were of a nature to rouse our scorn; from which the transition was not very long to systematic mutiny. Up to this time, say 1804, or 1805 (the year of Trafalgar), it had been the fixed assumption of the four inside people (as an old tradition of all public carriages derived from the reign of Charles II) that they, the illustrious quaternion, constituted a porcelain variety of the human race, whose dignity would have been compromised by exchanging one word of civility with the three miserable delf-ware outsides. Even to have kicked an outsider might have been held to attain the foot concerned in that operation, so that, perhaps, it would have required an act of Parliament to restore its purity of blood. What words, then, could express the horror, and the sense of

treason, in that case, which *had* happened, where all three outsides (the trinity of Pariahs<sup>1</sup>) made a vain attempt to sit down at the same breakfast-table or dinner-table with the consecrated four? I myself witnessed such an attempt; and on that occasion a benevolent old gentleman endeavoured to soothe his three holy associates, by suggesting that, if the outsides were indicted for this criminal attempt at the next assizes, the court would regard it as a case of lunacy or *delirium tremens* rather than of treason. England owes much of her grandeur to the depth of the aristocratic element in her social composition, when pulling against her strong democracy. I am not the man to laugh at it. But sometimes, undoubtedly, it expressed itself in comic shapes. The course taken with the infatuated outsiders, in the particular attempt which I have noticed, was that the waiter, beckoning them away from the privileged *salle-à-manger*, sang out, "This way, my good men," and then enticed these good men away to the kitchen. But that plan had not always answered. Sometimes, though rarely, cases occurred where the intruders, being stronger than usual, or more vicious than usual, resolutely refused to budge, and so far carried their point as to have a separate table arranged for themselves in a corner of the general room. Yet, if an Indian screen could be found ample enough to plant them out from the very eyes of the high table, or *dais*, it then became possible to assume as a fiction of law that the three delf fellows, after all, were not present. They could be ignored by the porcelain men, under the maxim that objects not appearing and objects not existing are governed by the same logical construction.<sup>2</sup>

Such being, at that time, the usage of mail-coaches, what was to be done by us of young Oxford? We, the most aristocratic of people, who were addicted to the practice of looking down superciliously even upon the insides themselves as often very questionable characters—were we, by voluntarily

<sup>1</sup> This word *Pariah* for "social outcast" (from the name of the lowest of the Hindoo ranks) was a favourite word in De Quincey's vocabulary, for which he often found very serious use.—M.

<sup>2</sup> *De non apparentibus, etc.* [*De non apparentibus et non existentibus eadem est lex*].

going outside, to court indignities? If our dress and bearing sheltered us generally from the suspicion of being "raff" (the name at that period for "snobs"<sup>1</sup>), we really *were* such constructively by the place we assumed. If we did not submit to the deep shadow of eclipse, we entered at least the skirts of its penumbra. And the analogy of theatres was valid against us, — where no man can complain of the annoyances incident to the pit or gallery, having his instant remedy in paying the higher price of the boxes. But the soundness of this analogy we disputed. In the case of the theatre, it cannot be pretended that the inferior situations have any separate attractions, unless the pit may be supposed to have an advantage for the purposes of the critic or the dramatic reporter. But the critic or reporter is a rarity. For most people, the sole benefit is in the price. Now, on the contrary, the outside of the mail had its own incommunicable advantages. These we could not forgo. The higher price we would willingly have paid, but not the price connected with the condition of riding inside; which condition we pronounced insufferable. The air, the freedom of prospect, the proximity to the horses, the elevation of seat: these were what we required; but, above all, the certain anticipation of purchasing occasional opportunities of driving.

Such was the difficulty which pressed us; and under the coercion of this difficulty we instituted a searching inquiry into the true quality and valuation of the different apartments about the mail. We conducted this inquiry on metaphysical principles; and it was ascertained satisfactorily that the roof of the coach, which by some weak men had been called the attics, and by some the garrets, was in reality the drawing-room; in which drawing-room the box was the chief ottoman or sofa; whilst it appeared that the *inside*, which had been traditionally regarded as the only room tenantable by gentlemen, was, in fact, the coal-cellar in disguise.

Great wits jump. The very same idea had not long

<sup>1</sup> "*Snobs*," and its antithesis, "*nobs*," arose among the internal factions of shoemakers perhaps ten years later. Possibly enough, the terms may have existed much earlier; but they were then first made known, picturesquely and effectively, by a trial at some assizes which happened to fix the public attention.

before struck the celestial intellect of China. Amongst the presents carried out by our first embassy to that country was a state-coach. It had been specially selected as a personal gift by George III; but the exact mode of using it was an intense mystery to Peking. The ambassador, indeed (Lord Macartney), had made some imperfect explanations upon this point; but, as His Excellency communicated these in a diplomatic whisper at the very moment of his departure, the celestial intellect was very feebly illuminated, and it became necessary to call a cabinet council on the grand state question, "Where was the Emperor to sit?" The hammer-cloth happened to be unusually gorgeous; and, partly on that consideration, but partly also because the box offered the most elevated seat, was nearest to the moon, and undeniably went foremost, it was resolved by acclamation that the box was the imperial throne, and, for the scoundrel who drove,—he might sit where he could find a perch. The horses, therefore, being harnessed, solemnly his imperial majesty ascended his new English throne under a flourish of trumpets, having the first lord of the treasury on his right hand, and the chief jester on his left. Peking gloried in the spectacle; and in the whole flowery people, constructively present by representation, there was but one discontented person, and *that* was the coachman. This mutinous individual audaciously shouted, "Where am I to sit?" But the privy council, incensed by his disloyalty, unanimously opened the door, and kicked him into the inside. He had all the inside places to himself; but such is the rapacity of ambition that he was still dissatisfied. "I say," he cried out in an extempore petition addressed to the Emperor through the window—"I say, how am I to catch hold of the reins?"—"Anyhow," was the imperial answer; "don't trouble *me*, man, in my glory. How catch the reins? Why, through the windows, through the keyholes—*anyhow*." Finally this contumacious coachman lengthened the check-strings into a sort of jury-reins communicating with the horses; with these he drove as steadily as Peking had any right to expect. The Emperor returned after the briefest of circuits; he descended in great pomp from his throne, with the severest resolution never to remount it. A public thanksgiving was ordered for his

majesty's happy escape from the disease of broken neck and the state-coach was dedicated thenceforward as a votive offering to the god Fo Fo—whom the learned more accurately called Fi Fi.<sup>1</sup>

A revolution of this same Chinese character did young Oxford of that era effect in the constitution of mail-coach society. It was a perfect French Revolution; and we had good reason to say, *ça ira*.<sup>2</sup> In fact, it soon became too popular. The "public"—a well-known character, particularly disagreeable, though slightly respectable, and notorious for affecting the chief seats in synagogues—had at first loudly opposed this revolution; but, when the opposition showed itself to be ineffectual, our disagreeable friend went into it with headlong zeal. At first it was a sort of race between us; and, as the public is usually from thirty to fifty years old, naturally we of young Oxford, that averaged about twenty, had the advantage. Then the public took to bribing, giving fees to horse-keepers, &c., who hired out their persons as warming-pans on the box-seat. *That*, you know, was shocking to all moral sensibilities. Come to bribery, said we, and there is an end to all morality,—Aristotle's, Zeno's, Cicero's, or anybody's. And, besides, of what use was it? For *we* bribed also. And, as our bribes, to those of the public, were as five shillings to sixpence, here again young Oxford had the advantage. But the contest was ruinous to the principles of the stables connected with the mails. This whole corporation was constantly bribed, rebribed, and often sur-rebribed; a mail-coach yard was like the hustings in a contested election; and a horse-keeper, ostler, or helper, was held by the philosophical at that time to be the most corrupt character in the nation.

There was an impression upon the public mind, natural enough from the continually augmenting velocity of the mail, but quite erroneous, that an outside seat on this class of carriages was a post of danger. On the contrary, I main-

<sup>1</sup> This paragraph is a caricature of a story told in Staunton's Account of the Earl of Macartney's Embassy to China in 1792.—M.

<sup>2</sup> *Ça ira* ("This will do," "This is the go"), a proverb of the French Revolutionists when they were hanging the aristocrats in the streets, &c., and the burden of one of the popular revolutionary songs—"Ça ira, ça ira, ça ira."—M.



tained that, if a man had become nervous from some gipsy prediction in his childhood, allocating to a particular moon now approaching some unknown danger, and he should inquire earnestly, "Whither can I fly for shelter?—Is a prison the safest retreat? or a lunatic hospital? or the British Museum?" I should have replied, "Oh no; I'll tell you what to do. Take lodgings for the next forty days on the box of his majesty's mail. Nobody can touch you there. If it is by bills at ninety days after date that you are made unhappy—if noters and protesters are the sort of wretches whose astrological shadows darken the house of life—then note you what I vehemently protest: viz. that, no matter though the sheriff and under-sheriff in every county should be running after you with his *posse*, touch a hair of your head he cannot whilst you keep house and have your legal domicile on the box of the mail. It is felony to stop the mail; even the sheriff cannot do that. And an *extra* touch of the whip to the leaders (no great matter if it grazes the sheriff) at any time guarantees your safety." In fact, a bedroom in a quiet house seems a safe enough retreat; yet it is liable to its own notorious nuisances—to robbers by night, to rats, to fire. But the mail laughs at these terrors. To robbers, the answer is packed up and ready for delivery in the barrel of the guard's blunderbuss. Rats again! there *are* none about mail-coaches, any more than snakes in Von Troil's Iceland<sup>1</sup>; except, indeed, now and then a parliamentary rat, who always hides his shame in what I have shown to be the "coal-cellar." And, as to fire, I never knew but one in a mail-coach; which was in the Exeter mail, and caused by an obstinate sailor bound to Devonport. Jack, making light of the law and the lawgiver that had set their faces against his offence, insisted on taking up a forbidden seat<sup>2</sup> in the rear of the roof, from which he could exchange

<sup>1</sup> "Von Troil's Iceland":—The allusion is to a well-known chapter in Von Troil's work, entitled, "Concerning the Snakes of Iceland." The entire chapter consists of these six words—"There are no snakes in Iceland."

<sup>2</sup> "Forbidden seat":—The very sternest code of rules was enforced upon the mails by the Post-office. Throughout England, only three outsides were allowed, of whom one was to sit on the box, and the other two immediately behind the box; none, under any pretext, to

his own yarns with those of the guard. No greater offence was then known to mail-coaches ; it was treason, it was *lata majestas*, it was by tendency arson ; and the ashes of Jack's pipe, falling amongst the straw of the hinder boot, containing the mail-bags, raised a flame which (aided by the wind of our motion) threatened a revolution in the republic of letters. Yet even this left the sanctity of the box unviolated. In dignified repose, the coachman and myself sat on, resting with benign composure upon our knowledge that the fire would have to burn its way through four inside passengers before it could reach ourselves. I remarked to the coachman, with a quotation from Virgil's *Æneid* really too hackneyed—

“ Jam proximus ardet  
Ucalegon.”

But, recollecting that the Virgilian part of the coachman's education might have been neglected, I interpreted so far as to say that perhaps at that moment the flames were catching hold of our worthy brother and inside passenger, Ucalegon. The coachman made no answer,—which is my own way when a stranger addresses me either in Syriac or in Coptic ; but by his faint sceptical smile he seemed to insinuate that he knew better,—for that Ucalegon, as it happened, was not in the way-bill, and therefore could not have been booked.

No dignity is perfect which does not at some point ally itself with the mysterious. The connexion of the mail with

come near the guard ; an indispensable caution ; since else, under the guise of a passenger, a robber might by any one of a thousand advantages—which sometimes are created, but always are favoured, by the animation of frank social intercourse—have disarmed the guard. Beyond the Scottish border, the regulation was so far relaxed as to allow of *four* outsides, but not relaxed at all as to the mode of placing them. One, as before, was seated on the box, and the other three on the front of the roof, with a determinate and ample separation from the little insulated chair of the guard. This relaxation was conceded by way of compensating to Scotland her disadvantages in point of population. England, by the superior density of her population, might always count upon a large fund of profits in the fractional trips of chance passengers riding for short distances of two or three stages. In Scotland this chance counted for much less. And therefore, to make good the deficiency, Scotland was allowed a compensatory profit upon one *extra* passenger.

the state and the executive government—a connexion obvious, but yet not strictly defined—gave to the whole mail establishment an official grandeur which did us service on the roads, and invested us with seasonable terrors. Not the less impressive were those terrors because their legal limits were imperfectly ascertained. Look at those turnpike gates: with what deferential hurry, with what an obedient start, they fly open at our approach! Look at that long line of carts and carters ahead, audaciously usurping the very crest of the road. Ah! traitors, they do not hear us as yet; but, as soon as the dreadful blast of our horn reaches them with proclamation of our approach, see with what frenzy of trepidation they fly to their horses' heads, and deprecate our wrath by the precipitation of their crane-neck quarterings. Treason they feel to be their crime; each individual carter feels himself under the ban of confiscation and attainder; his blood is attainted through six generations; and nothing is wanting but the headsman and his axe, the block and the sawdust, to close up the vista of his horrors. What! shall it be within benefit of clergy to delay the king's message on the high road?—to interrupt the great respirations, ebb and flood, *systole* and *diastole*, of the national intercourse?—to endanger the safety of tidings running day and night between all nations and languages? Or can it be fancied, amongst the weakest of men, that the bodies of the criminals will be given up to their widows for Christian burial? Now, the doubts which were raised as to our powers did more to wrap them in terror, by wrapping them in uncertainty, than could have been effected by the sharpest definitions of the law from the Quarter Sessions. We, on our parts (we, the collective mail, I mean), did our utmost to exalt the idea of our privileges by the insolence with which we wielded them. Whether this insolence rested upon law that gave it a sanction, or upon conscious power that haughtily dispensed with that sanction, equally it spoke from a potential station; and the agent, in each particular insolence of the moment, was viewed reverentially, as one having authority.

Sometimes after breakfast his majesty's mail would become frisky; and, in its difficult wheelings amongst the intricacies of early markets, it would upset an apple-cart, a cart loaded

with eggs, &c. Huge was the affliction and dismay, awful was the smash. I, as far as possible, endeavoured in such a case to represent the conscience and moral sensibilities of the mail; and, when wildernesses of eggs were lying poached under our horses' hoofs, then would I stretch forth my hands in sorrow, saying (in words too celebrated at that time, from the false echoes<sup>1</sup> of Marengo), "Ah! wherefore have we not time to weep over you?"—which was evidently impossible, since, in fact, we had not time to laugh over them. Tied to post-office allowance in some cases of fifty minutes for eleven miles, could the royal mail pretend to undertake the offices of sympathy and condolence? Could it be expected to provide tears for the accidents of the road? If even it seemed to trample on humanity, it did so, I felt, in discharge of its own more peremptory duties.

Upholding the morality of the mail, *a fortiori* I upheld its rights; as a matter of duty, I stretched to the uttermost its privilege of imperial precedency, and astonished weak minds by the feudal powers which I hinted to be lurking constructively in the charters of this proud establishment. Once I remember being on the box of the Holyhead mail, between Shrewsbury and Oswestry, when a tawdry thing from Birmingham, some "Tallyho" or "Highflyer," all flaunting with green and gold, came up alongside of us. What a contrast to our royal simplicity of form and colour in this plebeian wretch! The single ornament on our dark ground of chocolate colour was the mighty shield of the imperial arms, but emblazoned in proportions as modest as a signet-ring bears to a seal of office. Even this was displayed only on a single panel, whispering, rather than proclaiming, our relations to the mighty state; whilst the beast from Birmingham, our green-and-gold friend from false, fleeting, perjured Brummagem, had as much writing and painting on its sprawling flanks as would have puzzled a decipherer from

<sup>1</sup> "False echoes":—Yes, false! for the words ascribed to Napoleon, as breathed to the memory of Desaix, never were uttered at all. They stand in the same category of theatrical fictions as the cry of the foundering line-of-battle ship *Vengeur*, as the vaunt of General Cambronne at Waterloo, "*La Garde meurt, mais ne se rend pas*," or as the repartees of Talleyrand.

~~the tombs of Luxor.~~ For some time this Birmingham machine ran along by our side—a piece of familiarity that already of itself seemed to me sufficiently jacobinical. But all at once a movement of the horses announced a desperate intention of leaving us behind. “Do you see *that*?” I said to the coachman.—“I see,” was his short answer. He was wide awake,—yet he waited longer than seemed prudent; for the horses of our audacious opponent had a disagreeable air of freshness and power. But his motive was loyal; his wish was that the Birmingham conceit should be full-blown before he froze it. When *that* seemed right, he unloosed, or, to speak by a stronger word, he *sprang*, his known resources: he slipped our royal horses like cheetahs, or hunting-leopards, after the affrighted game. How they could retain such a reserve of fiery power after the work they had accomplished seemed hard to explain. But on our side, besides the physical superiority, was a tower of moral strength, namely the king’s name, “which they upon the adverse faction wanted.” Passing them without an effort, as it seemed, we threw them into the rear with so lengthening an interval between us as proved in itself the bitterest mockery of their presumption; whilst our guard blew back a shattering blast of triumph that was really too painfully full of derision.

I mention this little incident for its connexion with what followed. A Welsh rustic, sitting behind me, asked if I had not felt my heart burn within me during the progress of the race? I said, with philosophic calmness, *No*; because we were not racing with a mail, so that no glory could be gained. In fact, it was sufficiently mortifying that such a Birmingham thing should dare to challenge us. The Welshman replied that he didn’t see *that*; for that a cat might look at a king, and a Brummagem coach might lawfully race the Holyhead mail. “Race us, if you like,” I replied, “though even *that* has an air of sedition; but not *beat* us. This would have been treason; and for its own sake I am glad that the ‘Tallyho’ was disappointed.” So dissatisfied did the Welshman seem with this opinion that at last I was obliged to tell him a very fine story from one of our elder dramatists: viz. that once, in some far oriental kingdom, when the sultan of all the land, with his princes, ladies, and

chief omrahs, were flying their falcons, a hawk suddenly flew at a majestic eagle, and, in defiance of the eagle's natural advantages, in contempt also of the eagle's traditional royalty, and before the whole assembled field of astonished spectators from Agra and Lahore, killed the eagle on the spot. Amazement seized the sultan at the unequal contest, and burning admiration for its unparalleled result. He commanded that the hawk should be brought before him ; he caressed the bird with enthusiasm ; and he ordered that, for the commemoration of his matchless courage, a diadem of gold and rubies should be solemnly placed on the hawk's head, but then that, immediately after this solemn coronation, the bird should be led off to execution, as the most valiant indeed of traitors, but not the less a traitor, as having dared to rise rebelliously against his liege lord and anointed sovereign, the eagle. "Now," said I to the Welshman, "to you and me, as men of refined sensibilities, how painful it would have been that this poor Brummagem brute, the 'Tallyho,' in the impossible case of a victory over us, should have been crowned with Birmingham tinsel, with paste diamonds and Roman pearls, and then led off to instant execution." The Welshman doubted if that could be warranted by law. And, when I hinted at the 6th of Edward Longshanks, chap. 18, for regulating the precedency of coaches, as being probably the statute relied on for the capital punishment of such offences, he replied drily that, if the attempt to pass a mail really were treasonable, it was a pity that the "Tallyho" appeared to have so imperfect an acquaintance with law.

The modern modes of travelling cannot compare with the old mail-coach system in grandeur and power. They boast of more velocity,—not, however, as a consciousness, but as a fact of our lifeless knowledge, resting upon *alien* evidence : as, for instance, because somebody *says* that we have gone fifty miles in the hour, though we are far from feeling it as a personal experience ; or upon the evidence of a result, as that actually we find ourselves in York four hours after leaving London. Apart from such an assertion, or such a result, I myself am little aware of the pace. But, seated on the old mail-coach, we needed no evidence out of ourselves to indicate the velocity. On this system the word was not

*magna loquimur*, as upon railways, but *vivimus*. Yes, "*magna vivimus*"; we do not make verbal ostentation of our grandeurs, we realise our grandeurs in act, and in the very experience of life. The vital experience of the glad animal sensibilities made doubts impossible on the question of our speed; we heard our speed, we saw it, we felt it as a thrilling; and this speed was not the product of blind insensate agencies, that had no sympathy to give, but was incarnated in the fiery eyeballs of the noblest amongst brutes, in his dilated nostril, spasmodic muscles, and thunder-beating hoofs. The sensibility of the horse, uttering itself in the maniac light of his eye, might be the last vibration of such a movement; the glory of Salamanca might be the first. But the intervening links that connected them, that spread the earthquake of battle into the eyeball of the horse, were the heart of man and its electric thrillings—kindling in the rapture of the fiery strife, and then propagating its own tumults by contagious shouts and gestures to the heart of his servant the horse. But now, on the new system of travelling, iron tubes and boilers have disconnected man's heart from the ministers of his locomotion. Nile nor Trafalgar has power to raise an extra bubble in a steam-kettle. The galvanic cycle is broken up for ever; man's imperial nature no longer sends itself forward through the electric sensibility of the horse; the inter-agencies are gone in the mode of communication between the horse and his master out of which grew so many aspects of sublimity under accidents of mists that hid, or sudden blazes that revealed, of mobs that agitated, or midnight solitudes that awed. Tidings fitted to convulse all nations must henceforwards travel by culinary process; and the trumpet that once announced from afar the laurelled mail, heart-shaking when heard screaming on the wind and proclaiming itself through the darkness to every village or solitary house on its route, has now given way for ever to the pot-walloping of the boiler. Thus have perished multi-form openings for public expressions of interest, scenical yet natural, in great national tidings,—for revelations of faces and groups that could not offer themselves amongst the fluctuating mobs of a railway station. The gatherings of gazers about a laurelled mail had one centre, and

acknowledged one sole interest. But the crowds attending at a railway station have as little unity as running water, and own as many centres as there are separate carriages in the train.

How else, for example, than as a constant watcher for the dawn, and for the London mail that in summer months entered about daybreak amongst the lawny thickets of Marlborough forest, couldst thou, sweet Fanny of the Bath road, have become the glorified inmate of my dreams? Yet Fanny, as the loveliest young woman for face and person that perhaps in my whole life I have beheld, merited the station which even now, from a distance of forty years, she holds in my dreams; yes, though by links of natural association she brings along with her a troop of dreadful creatures, fabulous and not fabulous, that are more abominable to the heart than Fanny and the dawn are delightful.

Miss Fanny of the Bath road, strictly speaking, lived at a mile's distance from that road, but came so continually to meet the mail that I on my frequent transits rarely missed her, and naturally connected her image with the great thoroughfare where only I had ever seen her. Why she came so punctually I do not exactly know; but I believe with some burden of commissions, to be executed in Bath, which had gathered to her own residence as a central rendezvous for converging them. The mail-coachman who drove the Bath mail and wore the royal livery<sup>1</sup> happened to be Fanny's grandfather. A good man he was, that loved his beautiful granddaughter, and, loving her wisely, was vigilant over her deportment in any case where young Oxford might happen to be concerned. Did my vanity then suggest that I myself, individually, could fall within

<sup>1</sup> "*Wore the royal livery*":—The general impression was that the royal livery belonged of right to the mail-coachmen as their professional dress. But that was an error. To the guard it *did* belong, I believe, and was obviously essential as an official warrant, and as a means of instant identification for his person, in the discharge of his important public duties. But the coachman, and especially if his place in the series did not connect him immediately with London and the General Post-Office, obtained the scarlet coat only as an honorary distinction after long (or, if not long, trying and special) service.



the line of his terrors? Certainly not, as regarded any physical pretensions that I could plead; for Fanny (as a chance passenger from her own neighbourhood once told me) counted in her train a hundred and ninety-nine professed admirers, if not open aspirants to her favour; and probably not one of the whole brigade but excelled myself in personal advantages. Ulysses even, with the unfair advantage of his accursed bow, could hardly have undertaken that amount of suitors. So the danger might have seemed slight—only that woman is universally aristocratic; it is amongst her nobilities of heart that she *is* so. Now, the aristocratic distinctions in my favour might easily with Miss Fanny have compensated my physical deficiencies. Did I then make love to Fanny? Why, yes; about as much love as one *could* make whilst the mail was changing horses—a process which, ten years later, did not occupy above eighty seconds; but *then*,—viz. about Waterloo—it occupied five times eighty. Now, four hundred seconds offer a field quite ample enough for whispering into a young woman's ear a great deal of truth, and (by way of parenthesis) some trifle of falsehood. Grandpapa did right, therefore, to watch me. And yet, as happens too often to the grandpapas of earth in a contest with the admirers of granddaughters, how vainly would he have watched me had I meditated any evil whispers to Fanny! She, it is my belief, would have protected herself against any man's evil suggestions. But he, as the result showed, could not have intercepted the opportunities for such suggestions. Yet, why not? Was he not active? Was he not blooming? Blooming he was as Fanny herself.

“Say, all our praises why should lords——”

Stop, that's not the line.

“Say, all our roses why should girls engross?”

The coachman showed rosy blossoms on his face deeper even than his granddaughter's—*his* being drawn from the ale-cask, Fanny's from the fountains of the dawn. But, in spite of his blooming face, some infirmities he had; and one particularly in which he too much resembled a crocodile. This lay in a moustrous inaptitude for turning round. The crocodile,

I presume, owes that inaptitude to the absurd *length* of his back ; but in our grandpapa it arose rather from the absurd *breadth* of his back, combined, possibly, with some growing stiffness in his legs. Now, upon this crocodile infirmity of his I planted a human advantage for tendering my homage to Miss Fanny. In defiance of all his honourable vigilance, no sooner had he presented to us his mighty Jovian back (what a field for displaying to mankind his royal scarlet !), whilst inspecting professionally the buckles, the straps, and the silvery turrets<sup>1</sup> of his harness, than I raised Miss Fanny's hand to my lips, and, by the mixed tenderness and respectfulness of my manner, caused her easily to understand how happy it would make me to rank upon her list as No. 10 or 12 : in which case a few casualties amongst her lovers (and, observe, they *hanged* liberally in those days) might have promoted me speedily to the top of the tree ; as, on the other hand, with how much loyalty of submission I acquiesced by anticipation in her award, supposing that she should plant me in the very rearward of her favour, as No. 199 + 1. Most truly I loved this beautiful and ingenuous girl ; and, had it not been for the Bath mail, timing all courtships by post-office allowance, heaven only knows what might have come of it. People talk of being over head and ears in love ; now, the mail was the cause that I sank only over ears in love,—which, you know, still left a trifle of brain to overlook the whole conduct of the affair.

Ah, reader ! when I look back upon those days, it seems to me that all things change—all things perish. “Perish the roses and the palms of kings” : perish even the crowns and trophies of Waterloo : thunder and lightning are not the thunder and lightning which I remember. Roses are de-

<sup>1</sup> “*Turrets*” :—As one who loves and venerates Chaucer for his unrivalled merits of tenderness, of picturesque characterisation, and of narrative skill, I noticed with great pleasure that the word *torrettes* is used by him to designate the little devices through which the reins are made to pass [“*toretz fyled rounde*” occurs in line 1294 of the *Knights Tale* ; where, however, the reference is not to horse-trappings.—M.] This same word, in the same exact sense, I heard uniformly used by many scores of illustrious mail-coachmen to whose confidential friendship I had the honour of being admitted in my younger days.

generating. The Fannies of our island—though this I say with reluctance—are not visibly improving; and the Bath Road is notoriously superannuated. Crocodiles, you will say, are stationary. Mr. Waterton tells me that the crocodile does *not* change,—that a cayman, in fact, or an alligator, is just as good for riding upon as he was in the time of the Pharaohs. *That* may be; but the reason is that the crocodile does not live fast—he is a slow coach. I believe it is generally understood among naturalists that the crocodile is a blockhead. It is my own impression that the Pharaohs were also blockheads. Now, as the Pharaohs and the crocodile domineered over Egyptian society, this accounts for a singular mistake that prevailed through innumerable generations on the Nile. The crocodile made the ridiculous blunder of supposing man to be meant chiefly for his own eating. Man, taking a different view of the subject, naturally met that mistake by another: he viewed the crocodile as a thing sometimes to worship, but always to run away from. And this continued till Mr. Waterton<sup>1</sup> changed the relations between the animals. The mode of escaping from the reptile he showed to be not by running away, but by leaping on its back booted and spurred. The two animals had misunderstood each other. The use of the crocodile has now been cleared up—viz. to be ridden; and the final cause of man is that he may improve the health of the crocodile by riding him a-foxhunting before breakfast. And it is pretty certain that any crocodile who has been regularly hunted through the season, and is master of the weight he carries, will take a six-barred gate now as well as ever he would have done in the infancy of the pyramids.

<sup>1</sup> “*Mr. Waterton*”:—Had the reader lived through the last generation, he would not need to be told that, some thirty or thirty-five years back, Mr. Waterton, a distinguished country gentleman of ancient family in Northumberland [Charles Waterton, naturalist, born 1782, died 1865.—M.], publicly mounted and rode in top-boots a savage old crocodile, that was restive and very impertinent, but all to no purpose. The crocodile jibbed and tried to kick, but vainly. He was no more able to throw the squire than Sinbad was to throw the old scoundrel who used his back without paying for it, until he discovered a mode (slightly immoral, perhaps, though some think not) of murdering the old fraudulent jockey, and so circuitously of unhorsing him.

If, therefore, the crocodile does *not* change, all things else undeniably *do*: even the shadow of the pyramids grows less. And often the restoration in vision of Fanny and the Bath road makes me too pathetically sensible of that truth. Out of the darkness, if I happen to call back the image of Fanny, up rises suddenly from a gulf of forty years a rose in June; or, if I think for an instant of the rose in June, up rises the heavenly face of Fanny. One after the other, like the antiphonies in the choral service, rise Fanny and the rose in June, then back again the rose in June and Fanny. Then come both together, as in a chorus—roses and Fannies, Fannies and roses, without end, thick as blossoms in paradise. Then comes a venerable crocodile, in a royal livery of scarlet and gold, with sixteen capes; and the crocodile is driving four-in-hand from the box of the Bath mail. And suddenly we upon the mail are pulled up by a mighty dial, sculptured with the hours, that mingle with the heavens and the heavenly host. Then all at once we are arrived at Marlborough forest, amongst the lovely households<sup>1</sup> of the roe-deer; the deer and their fawns retire into the dewy thickets; the thickets are rich with roses; once again the roses call up the sweet countenance of Fanny; and she, being the granddaughter of a crocodile, awakens a dreadful host of semi-legendary animals—griffins, dragons, basilisks, sphinxes—till at length the whole vision of fighting images crowds into one towering armorial shield, a vast emblazonry of human charities and human loveliness that have perished, but quartered heraldically with unutterable and demoniac natures, whilst over all rises, as a surmounting crest, one fair female hand, with the forefinger pointing, in sweet, sorrowful admonition, upwards to heaven, where is sculptured the eternal writing which proclaims the frailty of earth and her children.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "*Households*":—Roe-deer do not congregate in herds like the fallow or the red deer, but by separate families, parents and children; which feature of approximation to the sanctity of human hearths, added to their comparatively miniature and graceful proportions, conciliates to them an interest of peculiar tenderness, supposing even that this beautiful creature is less characteristically impressed with the grandeurs of savage and forest life.

<sup>2</sup> This paragraph is but about one-fifth of the length of the corre-

## GOING DOWN WITH VICTORY

But the grandest chapter of our experience within the whole mail-coach service was on those occasions when we went down from London with the news of victory. A corresponding paragraph as it appeared originally in *Blackwood*, De Quincey's taste having led him, on revision in 1854, to cancel the other four-fifths as forced or irrelevant. The condensation was judicious for its particular purpose; but, as the original paragraph is too characteristic to be sacrificed altogether, we reproduce it here entire in detached form:—"Perhaps, therefore, the crocodile does *not* change, but all " things else *do*; even the shadow of the Pyramids grows less. And " often the restoration in vision of Fanny and the Bath road makes " me too pathetically sensible of that truth. Out of the darkness, if " I happen to call up the image of Fanny from thirty-five years back, " arises suddenly a rose in June; or, if I think for an instant of a " rose in June, up rises the heavenly face of Fanny. One after the " other, like the antiphonies in a choral service, rises Fanny and the " rose in June, then back again the rose in June and Fanny. Then " come both together, as in a chorus; roses and Fannies, Fannies and " roses, without end—thick as blossoms in paradise. Then comes a " venerable crocodile, in a royal livery of scarlet and gold, or in a " coat with sixteen capes; and the crocodile is driving four-in-hand " from the box of the Bath mail. And suddenly we upon the mail " are pulled up by a mighty dial, sculptured with the hours, and with " the dreadful legend of TOO LATE. Then all at once we are arrived " in Marlborough forest, amongst the lovely households of the roe- " deer: these retire into the dewy thickets; the thickets are rich " with roses; the roses call up (as ever) the sweet countenance of " Fanny, who, being the granddaughter of a crocodile, awakens a dread- " ful host of wild semi-legendary animals—griffins, dragons, basilisks, " sphinxes—till at length the whole vision of fighting images crowds " into one towering armorial shield, a vast emblazoury of human " charities and human loveliness that have perished, but quartered " heraldically with unutterable horrors of monstrous and demoniac " natures; whilst over all rises, as a surmounting crest, one fair " female hand, with the fore-finger pointing, in sweet, sorrowful " admonition, upwards to heaven, and having power (which, without " experience, I never could have believed) to awaken the pathos that " kills, in the very bosom of the horrors that madden, the grief that " gnaws at the heart, together with the monstrous creations of dark- " ness that shock the belief, and make dizzy the reason, of man. This " is the peculiarity that I wish the reader to notice, as having first " been made known to me for a possibility by this early vision of " Fanny on the Bath road. The peculiarity consisted in the conflu- " ence of two different keys, though apparently repelling each other, " into the music and governing principles of the same dream; horror, " such as possesses the maniac, and yet, by momentary transitions,

period of about ten years stretched from Trafalgar to Waterloo ; the second and third years of which period (1806 and 1807) were comparatively sterile ; but the other nine (from 1805 to 1815 inclusively) furnished a long succession of victories, the least of which, in such a contest of Titans, had

“ grief, such as may be supposed to possess the dying mother when  
 “ leaving her infant children to the mercies of the cruel. Usually,  
 “ and perhaps always, in an unshaken nervous system, these two  
 “ modes of misery exclude each other—here first they met in horrid  
 “ reconciliation. There was always a separate peculiarity in the  
 “ quality of the horror. This was afterwards developed into far more  
 “ revolting complexities of misery and incomprehensible darkness ;  
 “ and perhaps I am wrong in ascribing any value as a *causative*  
 “ agency to this particular case on the Bath road—possibly it fur-  
 “ nished merely an *occasion* that accidentally introduced a mode of  
 “ horrors certain, at any rate, to have grown up, with or without the  
 “ Bath road, from more advanced stages of the nervous derangement.  
 “ Yet, as the cubs of tigers or leopards, when domesticated, have been  
 “ observed to suffer a sudden development of their latent ferocity  
 “ under too eager an appeal to their playfulness—the gaieties of sport  
 “ in *them* being too closely connected with the fiery brightness of their  
 “ murderous instincts—so I have remarked that the caprices, the gay  
 “ arabesques, and the lively floral luxuriations of dreams, betray a  
 “ shocking tendency to pass into finer maniacal splendours. That  
 “ gaiety, for instance (for such at first it was), in the dreaming  
 “ faculty, by which one principal point of resemblance to a crocodile  
 “ in the mail-coachman was soon made to clothe him with the form  
 “ of a crocodile, and yet was blended with accessory circumstances  
 “ derived from his *human* functions, passed rapidly into a further  
 “ development, no longer gay or playful, but terrific, the most terrific  
 “ that besieges dreams—viz. the horrid inoculation upon each other  
 “ of incompatible natures. This horror has always been secretly felt  
 “ by man ; it was felt even under pagan forms of religion, which  
 “ offered a very feeble, and also a very limited, gamut for giving  
 “ expression to the human capacities of sublimity or of horror. We  
 “ read it in the fearful composition of the sphinx. The dragon,  
 “ again, is the snake inoculated upon the scorpion. The basilisk  
 “ unites the mysterious malice of the evil eye, unintentional on the  
 “ part of the unhappy agent, with the intentional venom of some  
 “ other malignant natures. But these horrid complexities of evil  
 “ agency are but *objectively* horrid ; they inflict the horror suitable to  
 “ their compound nature ; but there is no insinuation that they *feel*  
 “ that horror. Heraldry is so full of these fantastic creatures that, in  
 “ some zoologies, we find a separate chapter or a supplement dedi-  
 “ cated to what is denominated heraldic zoology. And why not ?  
 “ For these hideous creatures, however visionary, have a real tradi-  
 “ tionary ground in medieval belief—sincere and partly reasonable,  
 “ though adulterating with mendacity, blundering, credulity, and

an inappreciable value of position: partly for its absolute interference with the plans of our enemy, but still more from its keeping alive through central Europe the sense of a deep-seated vulnerability in France. Even to tease the coasts of our enemy, to mortify them by continual blockades, to insult them by capturing if it were but a baubling schooner under the eyes of their arrogant armies, repeated from time to time a sullen proclamation of power lodged in one quarter to which the hopes of Christendom turned in secret. How much more loudly must this proclamation have spoken in the audacity<sup>1</sup> of having bearded the *élite* of their troops, and

“intense superstition. But the dream-horror which I speak of is far more frightful. The dreamer finds housed within himself—occupying, as it were, some separate chamber in his brain—holding, perhaps, from that station a secret and detestable commerce with his own heart—some horrid alien nature. What if it were his own nature repeated,—still, if the duality were distinctly perceptible, even that—even this mere numerical double of his own consciousness—might be a curse too mighty to be sustained. But how if the alien nature contradicts his own, fights with it, perplexes and confounds it? How, again, if not one alien nature, but two, but three, but four, but five, are introduced within what once he thought the inviolable sanctuary of himself? These, however, are horrors from the kingdom of anarchy and darkness, which, by their very intensity, challenge the sanctity of concealment, and gloomily retire from exposition. Yet it was necessary to mention them, because the first introduction to such appearances (whether causal or merely casual) lay in the heraldic monsters, which monsters were themselves introduced (though playfully) by the transfigured coachman of the Bath mail.”—M.

<sup>1</sup> “*Audacity*” :—Such the French accounted it; and it has struck me that *Soult* would not have been so popular in London, at the period of her present Majesty’s coronation [28th June 1838], or in Manchester, on occasion of his visit to that town [July 1838], if they had been aware of the insolence with which he spoke of us in notes written at intervals from the field of Waterloo. As though it had been mere felony in our army to look a French one in the face, he said in more notes than one, dated from two to four P.M. on the field of Waterloo, “Here are the English—we have them; they are caught *en flagrant delit*.” Yet no man should have known us better; no man had drunk deeper from the cup of humiliation than *Soult* had in 1809, when ejected by us with headlong violence from Oporto, and pursued through a long line of wrecks to the frontier of Spain; and subsequently at Albuera, in the bloodiest of recorded battles [16th May 1811], to say nothing of *Toulouse* [10th April 1814], he should have learned our pretensions.

having beaten them in pitched battles ! Five years of life it was worth paying down for the privilege of an outside place on a mail-coach, when carrying down the first tidings of any such event. And it is to be noted that, from our insular situation, and the multitude of our frigates disposable for the rapid transmission of intelligence, rarely did any unauthorised rumour steal away a prelibation from the first aroma of the regular despatches. The government news was generally the earliest news.

From eight P.M. to fifteen or twenty minutes later imagine the mails assembled on parade in Lombard Street ; where, at that time,<sup>1</sup> and not in St. Martin's-le-Grand, was seated the General Post-office.<sup>2</sup> In what exact strength we mustered I do not remember ; but, from the length of each separate *attelage*, we filled the street, though a long one, and though we were drawn up in double file. On *any* night the spectacle was beautiful. The absolute perfection of all the appointments about the carriages and the harness, their strength, their brilliant cleanliness, their beautiful simplicity—but, more than all, the royal magnificence of the horses—were what might first have fixed the attention. Every carriage on every morning in the year was taken down to an official inspector for examination : wheels, axles, linchpins, pole, glasses, lamps, were all critically probed and tested. Every part of every carriage had been cleaned, every horse had been groomed, with as much rigour as if they belonged to a private gentleman ; and that part of the spectacle offered itself always. But the night before us is a night of victory ; and, behold ! to the ordinary display what a heart-shaking addition !—horses, men, carriages, all are dressed in laurels and flowers, oak-leaves and ribbons. The guards, as being officially his Majesty's servants, and of the coachmen such as are within the privilege of the post-office, wear the royal liveries of course ; and, as it is summer (for all the *land* victories were naturally won in summer), they wear, on this fine evening, these liveries exposed to view, without any covering of upper coats. Such a costume, and the elaborate

<sup>1</sup> "At that time" :—I speak of the era previous to Waterloo.

<sup>2</sup> The present General Post-office in St. Martin's-le-Grand was opened 23d Sept. 1829.—M.



arrangement of the laurels in their hats, dilate their hearts, by giving to them openly a personal connexion with the great news in which already they have the general interest of patriotism. That great national sentiment surmounts and quells all sense of ordinary distinctions. Those passengers who happen to be gentlemen are now hardly to be distinguished as such except by dress; for the usual reserve of their manner in speaking to the attendants has on this night melted away. One heart, one pride, one glory, connects every man by the transcendent bond of his national blood. The spectators, who are numerous beyond precedent, express their sympathy with these fervent feelings by continual hurrahs. Every moment are shouted aloud by the post-office servants, and summoned to draw up, the great ancestral names of cities known to history through a thousand years—Lincoln, Winchester, Portsmouth, Gloucester, Oxford, Bristol, Manchester, York, Newcastle, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Perth, Stirling, Aberdeen—expressing the grandeur of the empire by the antiquity of its towns, and the grandeur of the mail establishment by the diffusive radiation of its separate missions. Every moment you hear the thunder of lids locked down upon the mail-bags. That sound to each individual mail is the signal for drawing off; which process is the finest part of the entire spectacle. Then come the horses into play. Horses! can these be horses that bound off with the action and gestures of leopards? What stir!—what sea-like ferment!—what a thundering of wheels!—what a trampling of hoofs!—what a sounding of trumpets!—what farewell cheers—what redoubling peals of brotherly congratulation, connecting the name of the particular mail—“Liverpool for ever!”—with the name of the particular victory—“Badajoz for ever!” or “Salamanca for ever!” The half-slumbering consciousness that all night long, and all the next day—perhaps for even a longer period—many of these mails, like fire racing along a train of gunpowder, will be kindling at every instant new successions of burning joy, has an obscure effect of multiplying the victory itself, by multiplying to the imagination into infinity the stages of its progressive diffusion. A fiery arrow seems to be let loose, which from that moment is destined to travel, without inter-

mission, westwards for three hundred<sup>1</sup> miles—northwards for six hundred; and the sympathy of our Lombard Street friends at parting is exalted a hundredfold by a sort of visionary sympathy with the yet slumbering sympathies which in so vast a succession we are going to awake.

Liberated from the embarrassments of the city, and issuing into the broad uncrowded avenues of the northern suburbs, we soon begin to enter upon our natural pace of ten miles an hour. In the broad light of the summer evening, the sun, perhaps, only just at the point of setting, we are seen from every storey of every house. Heads of every age crowd to the windows; young and old understand the language of

<sup>1</sup> “*Three hundred*” :—Of necessity, this scale of measurement, to an American, if he happens to be a thoughtless man, must sound ludicrous. Accordingly, I remember a case in which an American writer indulges himself in the luxury of a little fibbing, by ascribing to an Englishman a pompous account of the Thames, constructed entirely upon American ideas of grandeur, and concluding in something like these terms:—“And, sir, arriving at London, this mighty father of rivers attains a breadth of at least two furlongs, having, in its winding course, traversed the astonishing distance of one hundred and seventy miles.” And this the candid American thinks it fair to contrast with the scale of the Mississippi. Now, it is hardly worth while to answer a pure fiction gravely; else one might say that no Englishman out of Bedlam ever thought of looking in an island for the rivers of a continent, nor, consequently, could have thought of looking for the peculiar grandeur of the Thames in the length of its course, or in the extent of soil which it drains. Yet, if *he had* been so absurd, the American might have recollected that a river, not to be compared with the Thames even as to volume of water—viz. the Tiber—has contrived to make itself heard of in this world for twenty-five centuries to an extent not reached as yet by any river, however corpulent, of his own land. The glory of the Thames is measured by the destiny of the population to which it ministers, by the commerce which it supports, by the grandeur of the empire in which, though far from the largest, it is the most influential stream. Upon some such scale, and not by a transfer of Columbian standards, is the course of our English mails to be valued. The American may fancy the effect of his own valuations to our English ears by supposing the case of a Siberian glorifying his country in these terms:—“These wretches, sir, in France and England, cannot march half a mile in any direction without finding a house where food can be had and lodging; whereas such is the noble desolation of our magnificent country that in many a direction for a thousand miles I will engage that a dog shall not find shelter from a snow-storm, nor a wren find an apology for breakfast.”

our victorious symbols ; and rolling volleys of sympathising cheers run along us, behind us, and before us. The beggar, rearing himself against the wall, forgets his lameness—real or assumed—thinks not of his whining trade, but stands erect, with bold exulting smiles, as we pass him. The victory has healed him, and says, Be thou whole ! Women and children, from garrets alike and cellars, through infinite London, look down or look up with loving eyes upon our gay ribbons and our martial laurels ; sometimes kiss their hands ; sometimes hang out, as signals of affection, pocket-handkerchiefs, aprons, dusters, anything that, by catching the summer breezes, will express an aerial jubilation. On the London side of Barnet, to which we draw near within a few minutes after nine, observe that private carriage which is approaching us. The weather being so warm, the glasses are all down ; and one may read, as on the stage of a theatre, everything that goes on within. It contains three ladies—one likely to be “mamma,” and two of seventeen or eighteen, who are probably her daughters. What lovely animation, what beautiful unpremeditated pantomime, explaining to us every syllable that passes, in these ingenuous girls ! By the sudden start and raising of the hands on first discovering our laurelled equipage, by the sudden movement and appeal to the elder lady from both of them, and by the heightened colour on their animated countenances, we can almost hear them saying, “See, see ! Look at their laurels ! Oh, mamma ! there has been a great battle in Spain ; and it has been a great victory.” In a moment we are on the point of passing them. We passengers—I on the box, and the two on the roof behind me—raise our hats to the ladies ; the coachman makes his professional salute with the whip ; the guard even, though punctilious on the matter of his dignity as an officer under the crown, touches his hat. The ladies move to us, in return, with a winning graciousness of gesture ; all smile on each side in a way that nobody could misunderstand, and that nothing short of a grand national sympathy could so instantaneously prompt. Will these ladies say that we are nothing to *them* ? Oh no ; they will not say *that*. They cannot deny—they do not deny—that for this night they are our sisters ; gentle or simple, scholar or illiterate

servant, for twelve hours to come, we on the outside have the honour to be their brothers. Those poor women, again, who stop to gaze upon us with delight at the entrance of Barnet, and seem, by their air of weariness, to be returning from labour—do you mean to say that they are washerwomen and charwomen? Oh, my poor friend, you are quite mistaken. I assure you they stand in a far higher rank; for this one night they feel themselves by birthright to be daughters of England, and answer to no humbler title.

Every joy, however, even rapturous joy—such is the sad law of earth—may carry with it grief, or fear of grief, to some. Three miles beyond Barnet, we see approaching us another private carriage, nearly repeating the circumstances of the former case. Here, also, the glasses are all down; here, also, is an elderly lady seated; but the two daughters are missing; for the single young person sitting by the lady's side seems to be an attendant—so I judge from her dress, and her air of respectful reserve. The lady is in mourning; and her countenance expresses sorrow. At first she does not look up; so that I believe she is not aware of our approach, until she hears the measured beating of our horses' hoofs. Then she raises her eyes to settle them painfully on our triumphal equipage. Our decorations explain the case to her at once; but she beholds them with apparent anxiety, or even with terror. Some time before this, I, finding it difficult to hit a flying mark when embarrassed by the coachman's person and reins intervening, had given to the guard a *Courier* evening paper, containing the gazette, for the next carriage that might pass. Accordingly he tossed it in, so folded that the huge capitals expressing some such legend as GLORIOUS VICTORY might catch the eye at once. To see the paper, however, at all, interpreted as it was by our ensigns of triumph, explained everything; and, if the guard were right in thinking the lady to have received it with a gesture of horror, it could not be doubtful that she had suffered some deep personal affliction in connexion with this Spanish war.

Here, now, was the case of one who, having formerly suffered, might, erroneously perhaps, be distressing herself with anticipations of another similar suffering. That same

night, and hardly three hours later, occurred the reverse case. A poor woman, who too probably would find herself, in a day or two, to have suffered the heaviest of afflictions by the battle, blindly allowed herself to express an exultation so unmeasured in the news and its details as gave to her the appearance which amongst Celtic Highlanders is called *fey*.<sup>1</sup> This was at some little town where we changed horses an hour or two after midnight. Some fair or wake had kept the people up out of their beds, and had occasioned a partial illumination of the stalls and booths, presenting an unusual but very impressive effect. We saw many lights moving about as we drew near; and perhaps the most striking scene on the whole route was our reception at this place. The flashing of torches and the beautiful radiance of blue lights (technically, Bengal lights) upon the heads of our horses; the fine effect of such a showery and ghostly illumination falling upon our flowers and glittering laurels<sup>2</sup>; whilst all around ourselves, that formed a centre of light, the darkness gathered on the rear and flanks in massy blackness: these optical splendours, together with the prodigious enthusiasm of the people, composed a picture at once scenical and affecting, theatrical and holy. As we staid for three or four minutes, I alighted; and immediately from a dismantled stall in the street, where no doubt she had been presiding through the earlier part of the night, advanced eagerly a middle-aged woman. The sight of my newspaper it was that had drawn her attention upon myself. The victory which we were carrying down to the provinces on *this* occasion was the imperfect one of Talavera—imperfect for its results, such was the virtual treachery of the Spanish general, Cuesta, but not imperfect in its ever-memorable

<sup>1</sup> *Fey*, fated, doomed to die: not a Celtic word, but an Anglo-Saxon word preserved in Lowland Scotch. "You are surely *fey*" would be said in Scotland to a person observed to be in extravagantly high spirits, or in any mood surprisingly beyond the bounds of his ordinary temperament,—the notion being that the excitement is supernatural, and a presage of his approaching death or of some other calamity about to befall him.—M.

<sup>2</sup> "*Glittering laurels*":—I must observe that the colour of *green* suffers almost a spiritual change and exaltation under the effect of Bengal lights.

heroism.<sup>1</sup> I told her the main outline of the battle. The agitation of her enthusiasm had been so conspicuous when listening, and when first applying for information, that I could not but ask her if she had not some relative in the Peninsular army. Oh yes; her only son was there. In what regiment? He was a trooper in the 23d Dragoons. My heart sank within me as she made that answer. This sublime regiment, which an Englishman should never mention without raising his hat to their memory, had made the most memorable and effective charge recorded in military annals. They leaped their horses—*over* a trench where they could; *into* it, and with the result of death or mutilation, when they could *not*. What proportion cleared the trench is nowhere stated. Those who *did* closed up and went down upon the enemy with such divinity of fervour (I use the word *divinity* by design: the inspiration of God must have prompted this movement to those whom even then He was calling to His presence) that two results followed. As regarded the enemy, this 23d Dragoons, not, I believe, originally three hundred and fifty strong, paralysed a French column six thousand strong, then ascended the hill, and fixed the gaze of the whole French army. As regarded themselves, the 23d were supposed at first to have been barely not annihilated; but eventually, I believe, about one in four survived. And this, then, was the regiment—a regiment already for some hours glorified and hallowed to the ear of all London, as lying stretched, by a large majority, upon one bloody aceldama—in which the young trooper served whose mother was now talking in a spirit of such joyous enthusiasm. Did I tell her the truth? Had I the heart to break up her dreams? No. To-morrow, said I to myself—to-morrow, or the next day, will publish the worst. For one night more wherefore should she not sleep in peace? After to-morrow the chances are too many that peace will forsake her pillow. This brief respite, then, let her owe to *my* gift and *my* forbearance. But, if I told her not of the bloody price that had been paid, not therefore was I silent

<sup>1</sup> Battle of Talavera, in Spain, but close to the Portuguese frontier, fought by Wellington (then Sir Arthur Wellesley) 27th and 28th July 1809.—M.

on the contributions from her son's regiment to that day's service and glory. I showed her not the funeral banners under which the noble regiment was sleeping. I lifted not the overshadowing laurels from the bloody trench in which horse and rider lay mangled together. But I told her how these dear children of England, officers and privates, had leaped their horses over all obstacles as gaily as hunters to the morning's chase. I told her how they rode their horses into the mists of death,—saying to myself, but not saying to *her*, “and laid down their young lives for thee, O mother England! as willingly—poured out their noble blood as cheerfully—as ever, after a long day's sport, when infants, they had rested their wearied heads upon their mother's knees, or had sunk to sleep in her arms.” Strange it is, yet true, that she seemed to have no fears for her son's safety, even after this knowledge that the 23d Dragoons had been memorably engaged; but so much was she enraptured by the knowledge that *his* regiment, and therefore that *he*, had rendered conspicuous service in the dreadful conflict—a service which had actually made them, within the last twelve hours, the foremost topic of conversation in London—so absolutely was fear swallowed up in joy—that, in the mere simplicity of her fervent nature, the poor woman threw her arms round my neck, as she thought of her son, and gave to *me* the kiss which secretly was meant for *him*.

## SECTION II—THE VISION OF SUDDEN DEATH<sup>1</sup>

What is to be taken as the predominant opinion of man, reflective and philosophic, upon SUDDEN DEATH? It is remarkable that, in different conditions of society, sudden death has been variously regarded as the consummation of an earthly career most fervently to be desired, or, again, as that consummation which is with most horror to be deprecated. Cæsar the Dictator, at his last dinner-party (*cæna*), on the

<sup>1</sup> In *Blackwood* for December 1849 there was prefixed to this Paper a paragraph within brackets, explaining its connexion with the preceding Section, which had appeared in October, and also its connexion with the subsequent “Dream-Fugue.” See *ante*, p 270, footnote.—M.

very evening before his assassination, when the minutes of his earthly career were numbered, being asked what death, in *his* judgment, might be pronounced the most eligible, replied "That which should be most sudden." On the other hand, the divine Litany of our English Church, when breathing forth supplications, as if in some representative character, for the whole human race prostrate before God, places such a death in the very van of horrors: "From lightning and tempest; from plague, pestilence, and famine; from battle and murder, and from SUDDEN DEATH—Good Lord, deliver us." Sudden death is here made to crown the climax in a grand ascent of calamities; it is ranked among the last of curses; and yet by the noblest of Romans it was ranked as the first of blessings. In that difference most readers will see little more than the essential difference between Christianity and Paganism. But this, on consideration, I doubt. The Christian Church may be right in its estimate of sudden death; and it is a natural feeling, though after all it may also be an infirm one, to wish for a quiet dismissal from life, as that which *seems* most reconcilable with meditation, with penitential retrospects, and with the humilities of farewell prayer. There does not, however, occur to me any direct scriptural warrant for this earnest petition of the English Litany, unless under a special construction of the word "sudden." It seems a petition indulged rather and conceded to human infirmity than exacted from human piety. It is not so much a doctrine built upon the eternities of the Christian system as a plausible opinion built upon special varieties of physical temperament. Let that, however, be as it may, two remarks suggest themselves as prudent restraints upon a doctrine which else *may* wander, and *has* wandered, into an uncharitable superstition. The first is this: that many people are likely to exaggerate the horror of a sudden death from the disposition to lay a false stress upon words or acts simply because by an accident they have become *final* words or acts. If a man dies, for instance, by some sudden death when he happens to be intoxicated, such a death is falsely regarded with peculiar horror; as though the intoxication were suddenly exalted into a blasphemy. But *that* is unphilosophic. The man was, or he was not, *habitu-*



ally a drunkard. If not, if his intoxication were a solitary accident, there can be no reason for allowing special emphasis to this act simply because through misfortune it became his final act. Nor, on the other hand, if it were no accident, but one of his *habitual* transgressions, will it be the more habitual or the more a transgression because some sudden calamity, surprising him, has caused this habitual transgression to be also a final one. Could the man have had any reason even dimly to foresee his own sudden death, there would have been a new feature in his act of intemperance—a feature of presumption and irreverence, as in one that, having known himself drawing near to the presence of God, should have suited his demeanour to an expectation so awful. But this is no part of the case supposed. And the only new element in the man's act is not any element of special immorality, but simply of special misfortune.

The other remark has reference to the meaning of the word *sudden*. Very possibly Cæsar and the Christian Church do not differ in the way supposed,—that is, do not differ by any difference of doctrine as between Pagan and Christian views of the moral temper appropriate to death; but perhaps they are contemplating different cases. Both contemplate a violent death, a *Βιαιθανατος*—death that is *βιαιος*, or, in other words, death that is brought about, not by internal and spontaneous change, but by active force having its origin from without.<sup>1</sup> In this meaning the two authorities agree. Thus far they are in harmony. But the difference is that the Roman by the word “sudden” means *unlingering*, whereas the Christian Litany by “sudden death” means a death *without warning*, consequently without any available summons to religious preparation. The poor mutineer who kneels down to gather into his heart the bullets from twelve firelocks of his pitying comrades dies by a most sudden death in Cæsar's sense; one shock, one mighty spasm, one (possibly *not* one) groan, and all is over. But, in the sense of the Litany, the mutineer's death is far from sudden: his offence originally, his imprisonment, his trial, the interval between his sentence and its execution, having

<sup>1</sup> *Biaios*, Greek for “forcible” or “violent”: hence *Biathanatos*, violent death.—M.

all furnished him with separate warnings of his fate—having all summoned him to meet it with solemn preparation.

Here at once, in this sharp verbal distinction, we comprehend the faithful earnestness with which a holy Christian Church pleads on behalf of her poor departing children that God would vouchsafe to them the last great privilege and distinction possible on a death-bed, viz. the opportunity of untroubled preparation for facing this mighty trial. Sudden death, as a mere variety in the modes of dying where death in some shape is inevitable, proposes a question of choice which, equally in the Roman and the Christian sense, will be variously answered according to each man's variety of temperament. Meantime, one aspect of sudden death there is, one modification, upon which no doubt can arise, that of all martyrdoms it is the most agitating—viz. where it surprises a man under circumstances which offer (or which seem to offer) some hurrying, flying, inappreciably minute chance of evading it. Sudden as the danger which it affronts must be any effort by which such an evasion can be accomplished. Even *that*, even the sickening necessity for hurrying in extremity where all hurry seems destined to be vain,—even that anguish is liable to a hideous exasperation in one particular case: viz. where the appeal is made not exclusively to the instinct of self-preservation, but to the conscience, on behalf of some other life besides your own, accidentally thrown upon *your* protection. To fail, to collapse in a service merely your own, might seem comparatively venial; though, in fact, it is far from venial. But to fail in a case where Providence has suddenly thrown into your hands the final interests of another,—a fellow-creature shuddering between the gates of life and death: this, to a man of apprehensive conscience, would mingle the misery of an atrocious criminality with the misery of a bloody calamity. You are called upon, by the case supposed, possibly to die, but to die at the very moment when, by any even partial failure or effeminate collapse of your energies, you will be self-denounced as a murderer. You had but the twinkling of an eye for your effort, and that effort might have been unavailing; but to have risen to the level of such an effort would have rescued you, though

not from dying, yet from dying as a traitor to your final and farewell duty.

The situation here contemplated exposes a dreadful ulcer, lurking far down in the depths of human nature. It is not that men generally are summoned to face such awful trials. But potentially, and in shadowy outline, such a trial is moving subterraneously in perhaps all men's natures. Upon the secret mirror of our dreams such a trial is darkly projected, perhaps, to every one of us. That dream, so familiar to childhood, of meeting a lion, and, through languishing prostration in hope and the energies of hope, that constant sequel of lying down before the lion, publishes the secret frailty of human nature—reveals its deep-seated falsehood to itself—records its abysmal treachery. Perhaps not one of us escapes that dream; perhaps, as by some sorrowful doom of man, that dream repeats for every one of us, through every generation, the original temptation in Eden. Every one of us, in this dream, has a bait offered to the infirm places of his own individual will; once again a snare is presented for tempting him into captivity to a luxury of ruin; once again, as in aboriginal Paradise, the man falls by his own choice; again, by infinite iteration, the ancient earth groans to Heaven, through her secret caves, over the weakness of her child. "Nature, from her seat, sighing through all her works," again "gives signs of woe that all is lost"; and again the counter-sigh is repeated to the sorrowing heavens for the endless rebellion against God. It is not without probability that in the world of dreams every one of us ratifies for himself the original transgression. In dreams, perhaps under some secret conflict of the midnight sleeper, lighted up to the consciousness at the time, but darkened to the memory as soon as all is finished, each several child of our mysterious race completes for himself the treason of the aboriginal fall.

The incident, so memorable in itself by its features of horror, and so scenical by its grouping for the eye, which furnished the text for this reverie upon *Sudden Death*, occurred to myself in the dead of night, as a solitary spectator, when seated on the box of the Manchester and Glasgow

mail, in the second or third summer after Waterloo. I find it necessary to relate the circumstances, because they are such as could not have occurred unless under a singular combination of accidents. In those days, the oblique and lateral communications with many rural post-offices were so arranged, either through necessity or through defect of system, as to make it requisite for the main north-western mail (*i.e.* the *down* mail) on reaching Manchester to halt for a number of hours; how many, I do not remember; six or seven, I think; but the result was that, in the ordinary course, the mail recommenced its journey northwards about midnight. Wearied with the long detention at a gloomy hotel, I walked out about eleven o'clock at night for the sake of fresh air; meaning to fall in with the mail and resume my seat at the post-office. The night, however, being yet dark, as the moon had scarcely risen, and the streets being at that hour empty, so as to offer no opportunities for asking the road, I lost my way, and did not reach the post-office until it was considerably past midnight; but, to my great relief (as it was important for me to be in Westmorland by the morning), I saw in the huge saucer eyes of the mail, blazing through the gloom, an evidence that my chance was not yet lost. Past the time it was; but, by some rare accident, the mail was not even yet ready to start. I ascended to my seat on the box, where my cloak was still lying as it had lain at the Bridgewater Arms. I had left it there in imitation of a nautical discoverer, who leaves a bit of bunting on the shore of his discovery, by way of warning off the ground the whole human race, and notifying to the Christian and the heathen worlds, with his best compliments, that he has hoisted his pocket-handkerchief once and for ever upon that virgin soil: thenceforward claiming the *jus dominii* to the top of the atmosphere above it, and also the right of driving shafts to the centre of the earth below it; so that all people found after this warning either aloft in upper chambers of the atmosphere, or groping in subterraneous shafts, or squatting audaciously on the surface of the soil, will be treated as trespassers—kicked, that is to say, or decapitated, as circumstances may suggest, by their very faithful servant, the owner of the said pocket-handkerchief. In the present case,

it is probable that my cloak might not have been respected, and the *jus gentium* might have been cruelly violated in my person—for, in the dark, people commit deeds of darkness, gas being a great ally of morality; but it so happened that on this night there was no other outside passenger; and thus the crime, which else was but too probable, missed fire for want of a criminal.

Having mounted the box, I took a small quantity of laudanum, having already travelled two hundred and fifty miles—viz. from a point seventy miles beyond London. In the taking of laudanum there was nothing extraordinary. But by accident it drew upon me the special attention of my assessor on the box, the coachman. And in *that* also there was nothing extraordinary. But by accident, and with great delight, it drew my own attention to the fact that this coachman was a monster in point of bulk, and that he had but one eye. In fact, he had been foretold by Virgil as

“Monstrum horrendum, informe, ingens, cui lumen ademptum.”

He answered to the conditions in every one of the items:—1, a monster he was; 2, dreadful; 3, shapeless; 4, huge; 5, who had lost an eye. But why should *that* delight me? Had he been one of the Calendars in the *Arabian Nights*, and had paid down his eye as the price of his criminal curiosity, what right had *I* to exult in his misfortune? I did *not* exult; I delighted in no man's punishment, though it were even merited. But these personal distinctions (Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5) identified in an instant an old friend of mine whom I had known in the south for some years as the most masterly of mail-coachmen. He was the man in all Europe that could (if *any* could) have driven six-in-hand full gallop over *Al Sirat*—that dreadful bridge of Mahomet, with no side battlements, and of *extra* room not enough for a razor's edge—leading right across the bottomless gulf. Under this eminent man, whom in Greek I cognominated Cyclops *Diphrelates* (Cyclops the Charioteer), I, and others known to me, studied the diphrelatic art. Excuse, reader, a word too elegant to be pedantic.<sup>1</sup> As a pupil, though I paid extra

<sup>1</sup> For the last two sentences the original in *Blackwood* had these four:—“I used to call him *Cyclops Mastigophorus*, Cyclops the Whip-

fees, it is to be lamented that I did not stand high in his esteem. It showed his dogged honesty (though, observe, not his discernment) that he could not see my merits. Let us excuse his absurdity in this particular by remembering his want of an eye. Doubtless *that* made him blind to my merits. In the art of conversation, however, he admitted that I had the whip-hand of him. On this present occasion great joy was at our meeting. But what was Cyclops doing here? Had the medical men recommended northern air, or how? I collected, from such explanations as he volunteered, that he had an interest at stake in some suit-at-law now pending at Lancaster; so that probably he had got himself transferred to this station for the purpose of connecting with his professional pursuits an instant readiness for the calls of his lawsuit.

Meantime, what are we stopping for? Surely we have now waited long enough. Oh, this procrastinating mail, and this procrastinating post-office! Can't they take a lesson upon that subject from *me*? Some people have called *me* procrastinating. Yet you are witness, reader, that I was here kept waiting for the post-office. Will the post-office lay its hand on its heart, in its moments of sobriety, and assert that ever it waited for me? What are they about? The guard tells me that there is a large extra accumulation of foreign mails this night, owing to irregularities caused by war, by wind, by weather, in the packet service, which as yet does not benefit at all by steam. For an *extra* hour, it seems, the post-office has been engaged in threshing out the pure wheaten correspondence of Glasgow, and winnowing it from the chaff of all baser intermediate towns. But at last all is finished. Sound your horn, guard! Manchester, good-bye!; we've lost an hour by your criminal conduct at

bearer, until I observed that his skill made whips useless, except to fetch off an impertinent fly from a leader's head; upon which I changed his Grecian name to Cyclops *Diphrelates* (Cyclops the Charioteer). I, and others known to me, studied under him the diphrelatic art. Excuse, reader, a word too elegant to be pedantic. And also take this remark from me as a *gage d'amitié*—that no word ever was or *can* be pedantic which, by supporting a distinction, supports the accuracy of logic, or which fills up a chasm for the understanding."—M.

the post-office: which, however, though I do not mean to part with a serviceable ground of complaint, and one which really is such for the horses, to me secretly is an advantage, since it compels us to look sharply for this lost hour amongst the next eight or nine, and to recover it (if we can) at the rate of one mile extra per hour. Off we are at last, and at eleven miles an hour; and for the moment I detect no changes in the energy or in the skill of Cyclops.

From Manchester to Kendal, which virtually (though not in law) is the capital of Westmorland, there were at this time seven stages of eleven miles each. The first five of these, counting from Manchester, terminate in Lancaster; which is therefore fifty-five miles north of Manchester, and the same distance exactly from Liverpool. The first three stages terminate in Preston (called, by way of distinction from other towns of that name, *Proud Preston*); at which place it is that the separate roads from Liverpool and from Manchester to the north become confluent.<sup>1</sup> Within these first three stages lay the foundation, the progress, and termination of our night's adventure. During the first stage, I found out that Cyclops was mortal: he was liable to the shocking affection of sleep—a thing which previously I had never suspected. If a man indulges in the vicious habit of sleeping, all the skill in aurigation of Apollo himself, with the horses of Aurora to execute his notions, avails him nothing. "Oh, Cyclops!" I exclaimed, "thou art mortal. My friend, thou snoorest." Through the first eleven miles, however, this infirmity—which I grieve to say that he shared with the whole Pagan Pantheon—betrayed itself only by brief snatches. On waking up, he made an apology for himself which, instead of mending matters, laid open a gloomy vista of coming disasters. The summer assizes, he reminded me, were now going on at Lancaster: in consequence of which for three nights and three days he had not lain down in a bed. During

<sup>1</sup> "*Confluent*":—Suppose a capital Y (the Pythagorean letter): Lancaster is at the foot of this letter; Liverpool at the top of the *right* branch; Manchester at the top of the *left*; Proud Preston at the centre, where the two branches unite. It is thirty-three miles along either of the two branches; it is twenty-two miles along the stem—viz. from Preston in the middle to Lancaster at the root. There's a lesson in geography for the reader!

the day he was waiting for his own summons as a witness on the trial in which he was interested, or else, lest he should be missing at the critical moment, was drinking with the other witnesses under the pastoral surveillance of the attorneys. During the night, or that part of it which at sea would form the middle watch, he was driving. This explanation certainly accounted for his drowsiness, but in a way which made it much more alarming; since now, after several days' resistance to this infirmity, at length he was steadily giving way. Throughout the second stage he grew more and more drowsy. In the second mile of the third stage he surrendered himself finally and without a struggle to his perilous temptation. All his past resistance had but deepened the weight of this final oppression. Seven atmospheres of sleep rested upon him; and, to consummate the case, our worthy guard, after singing "Love amongst the Roses" for perhaps thirty times, without invitation and without applause, had in revenge moodily resigned himself to slumber—not so deep, doubtless, as the coachman's, but deep enough for mischief. And thus at last, about ten miles from Preston, it came about that I found myself left in charge of his Majesty's London and Glasgow mail, then running at the least twelve miles an hour.

What made this negligence less criminal than else it must have been thought was the condition of the roads at night during the assizes. At that time, all the law business of populous Liverpool, and also of populous Manchester, with its vast cincture of populous rural districts, was called up by ancient usage to the tribunal of Lilliputian Lancaster. To break up this old traditional usage required, 1, a conflict with powerful established interests, 2, a large system of new arrangements, and 3, a new parliamentary statute. But as yet this change was merely in contemplation. As things were at present, twice in the year<sup>1</sup> so vast a body of business rolled northwards from the southern quarter of the county that for a fortnight at least it occupied the severe exertions of two judges in its despatch. The consequence of this was

<sup>1</sup> "*Twice in the year*":—There were at that time only two assizes even in the most populous counties—viz. the Lent Assizes and the Summer Assizes.



that every horse available for such a service, along the whole line of road, was exhausted in carrying down the multitudes of people who were parties to the different suits. By sunset, therefore, it usually happened that, through utter exhaustion amongst men and horses, the road sank into profound silence. Except the exhaustion in the vast adjacent county of York from a contested election, no such silence succeeding to no such fiery uproar was ever witnessed in England.

On this occasion the usual silence and solitude prevailed along the road. Not a hoof nor a wheel was to be heard. And, to strengthen this false luxurious confidence in the noiseless roads, it happened also that the night was one of peculiar solemnity and peace. For my own part, though slightly alive to the possibilities of peril, I had so far yielded to the influence of the mighty calm as to sink into a profound reverie. The month was August; in the middle of which lay my own birthday—a festival to every thoughtful man suggesting solemn and often sigh-born<sup>1</sup> thoughts. The county was my own native county—upon which, in its southern section, more than upon any equal area known to man past or present, had descended the original curse of labour in its heaviest form, not mastering the bodies only of men, as of slaves, or criminals in mines, but working through the fiery will. Upon no equal space of earth was, or ever had been, the same energy of human power put forth daily. At this particular season also of the assizes, that dreadful hurricane of flight and pursuit, as it might have seemed to a stranger, which swept to and from Lancaster all day long, hunting the county up and down, and regularly subsiding back into silence about sunset, could not fail (when united with this permanent distinction of Lancashire as the very metropolis and citadel of labour) to point the thoughts pathetically upon that counter-vision of rest, of saintly repose from strife and sorrow, towards which, as to their secret haven, the profounder aspirations of man's heart are in solitude continually travelling. Obliquely upon our left we were nearing the sea; which also must, under the present

<sup>1</sup> “*Sigh-born*”:—I owe the suggestion of this word to an obscure remembrance of a beautiful phrase in “*Giraldus Cambrensis*”—viz. *suspiciosæ cogitationes*.

circumstances, be repeating the general state of halcyon repose. The sea, the atmosphere, the light, bore each an orchestral part in this universal lull. Moonlight and the first timid tremblings of the dawn were by this time blending; and the blendings were brought into a still more exquisite state of unity by a slight silvery mist, motionless and dreamy, that covered the woods and fields, but with a veil of equable transparency. Except the feet of our own horses,—which, running on a sandy margin of the road, made but little disturbance,—there was no sound abroad. In the clouds and on the earth prevailed the same majestic peace; and, in spite of all that the villain of a schoolmaster has done for the ruin of our sublimer thoughts, which are the thoughts of our infancy, we still believe in no such nonsense as a limited atmosphere. Whatever we may swear with our false feigning lips, in our faithful hearts we still believe, and must for ever believe, in fields of air traversing the total gulf between earth and the central heavens. Still, in the confidence of children that tread without fear *every* chamber in their father's house, and to whom no door is closed, we, in that Sabbatic vision which sometimes is revealed for an hour upon nights like this, ascend with easy steps from the sorrow-stricken fields of earth upwards to the sandals of God.

Suddenly, from thoughts like these I was awakened to a sullen sound, as of some motion on the distant road. It stole upon the air for a moment; I listened in awe; but then it died away. Once roused, however, I could not but observe with alarm the quickened motion of our horses. Ten years' experience had made my eye learned in the valuing of motion; and I saw that we were now running thirteen miles an hour. I pretend to no presence of mind. On the contrary, my fear is that I am miserably and shamefully deficient in that quality as regards action. The palsy of doubt and distraction hangs like some guilty weight of dark unfathomed remembrances upon my energies when the signal is flying for *action*. But, on the other hand, this accursed gift I have, as regards *thought*, that in the first step towards the possibility of a misfortune I see its total evolution; in the radix of the series I see too certainly and too instantly

its entire expansion ; in the first syllable of the dreadful sentence I read already the last. It was not that I feared for ourselves. *Us* our bulk and impetus charmed against peril in any collision. And I had ridden through too many hundreds of perils that were frightful to approach, that were matter of laughter to look back upon, the first face of which was horror, the parting face a jest—for any anxiety to rest upon *our* interests. The mail was not built, I felt assured, nor bespoke, that could betray *me* who trusted to its protection. But any carriage that we could meet would be frail and light in comparison of ourselves. And I remarked this ominous accident of our situation,—we were on the wrong side of the road. But then, it may be said, the other party, if other there was, might also be on the wrong side ; and two wrongs might make a right. *That* was not likely. The same motive which had drawn *us* to the right-hand side of the road—viz. the luxury of the soft beaten sand as contrasted with the paved centre—would prove attractive to others. The two adverse carriages would therefore, to a certainty, be travelling on the same side ; and from this side, as not being ours in law, the crossing over to the other would, of course, be looked for from *us*.<sup>1</sup> Our lamps, still lighted, would give the impression of vigilance on our part. And every creature that met us would rely upon *us* for quartering.<sup>2</sup> All this, and if the separate links of the anticipation had been a thousand times more, I saw, not discursively, or by effort, or by succession, but by one flash of horrid simultaneous intuition.

Under this steady though rapid anticipation of the evil which *might* be gathering ahead, ah ! what a sullen mystery of fear, what a sigh of woe, was that which stole upon the air, as again the far-off sound of a wheel was heard ! A whisper it was—a whisper from, perhaps, four miles off—

<sup>1</sup> It is true that, according to the law of the case as established by legal precedents, all carriages were required to give way before royal equipages, and therefore before the mail as one of them. But this only increased the danger, as being a regulation very imperfectly made known, very unequally enforced, and therefore often embarrassing the movements on both sides.

<sup>2</sup> “*Quartering*” :—This is the technical word, and, I presume, derived from the French *cartayer*, to evade a rut or any obstacle.

secretly announcing a ruin that, being foreseen, was not the less inevitable ; that, being known, was not therefore healed. What could be done—who was it that could do it—to check the storm-flight of these maniacal horses ? Could I not seize the reins from the grasp of the slumbering coachman ? You, reader, think that it would have been in *your* power to do so. And I quarrel not with your estimate of yourself. But, from the way in which the coachman's hand was viced between his upper and lower thigh, this was impossible. Easy was it ? See, then, that bronze equestrian statue. The cruel rider has kept the bit in his horse's mouth for two centuries. Unbridle him for a minute, if you please, and wash his mouth with water. Easy was it ? Unhorse me, then, that imperial rider ; knock me those marble feet from those marble stirrups of Charlemagne.

The sounds ahead strengthened, and were now too clearly the sounds of wheels. Who and what could it be ? Was it industry in a taxed cart ? Was it youthful gaiety in a gig ? Was it sorrow that loitered, or joy that raced ? For as yet the snatches of sound were too intermitting, from distance, to decipher the character of the motion. Whoever were the travellers, something must be done to warn them. Upon the other party rests the active responsibility, but upon *us*—and, woe is me ! that *us* was reduced to my frail opium-shattered self—rests the responsibility of warning. Yet, how should this be accomplished ? Might I not sound the guard's horn ? Already, on the first thought, I was making my way over the roof to the guard's seat. But this, from the accident which I have mentioned, of the foreign mails being piled upon the roof, was a difficult and even dangerous attempt to one cramped by nearly three hundred miles of outside travelling. And, fortunately, before I had lost much time in the attempt, our frantic horses swept round an angle of the road which opened upon us that final stage where the collision must be accomplished and the catastrophe sealed. All was apparently finished. The court was sitting ; the case was heard ; the judge had finished ; and only the verdict was yet in arrear.

Before us lay an avenue straight as an arrow, six hundred yards, perhaps, in length ; and the umbrageous trees, which

rose in a regular line from either side, meeting high overhead, gave to it the character of a cathedral aisle. These trees lent a deeper solemnity to the early light ; but there was still light enough to perceive, at the further end of this Gothic aisle, a frail reedy gig, in which were seated a young man, and by his side a young lady. Ah, young sir ! what are you about ? If it is requisite that you should whisper your communications to this young lady—though really I see nobody, at an hour and on a road so solitary, likely to overhear you—is it therefore requisite that you should carry your lips forward to hers ? The little carriage is creeping on at one mile an hour ; and the parties within it, being thus tenderly engaged, are naturally bending down their heads. Between them and eternity, to all human calculation, there is but a minute and a-half. Oh heavens ! what is it that I shall do ? Speaking or acting, what help can I offer ? Strange it is, and to a mere auditor of the tale might seem laughable, that I should need a suggestion from the *Iliad* to prompt the sole resource that remained. Yet so it was. Suddenly I remembered the shout of Achilles, and its effect. But could I pretend to shout like the son of Peleus, aided by Pallas ? No : but then I needed not the shout that should alarm all Asia militant ; such a shout would suffice as might carry terror into the hearts of two thoughtless young people and one gig-horse. I shouted—and the young man heard me not. A second time I shouted—and now he heard me, for now he raised his head.

Here, then, all had been done that, by me, *could* be done ; more on *my* part was not possible. Mine had been the first step ; the second was for the young man ; the third was for God. If, said I, this stranger is a brave man, and if indeed he loves the young girl at his side—or, loving her not, if he feels the obligation, pressing upon every man worthy to be called a man, of doing his utmost for a woman confided to his protection—he will at least make some effort to save her. If *that* fails, he will not perish the more, or by a death more cruel, for having made it ; and he will die as a brave man should, with his face to the danger, and with his arm about the woman that he sought in vain to save. But, if he makes no effort,—shrinking without a struggle from his duty,—he

himself will not the less certainly perish for this baseness of poltroonery. He will die no less : and why not ? Wherefore should we grieve that there is one craven less in the world ? No ; *let* him perish, without a pitying thought of ours wasted upon him ; and, in that case, all our grief will be reserved for the fate of the helpless girl who now, upon the least shadow of failure in *him*, must by the fiercest of translations—must without time for a prayer—must within seventy seconds—stand before the judgment-seat of God.

But craven he was not : sudden had been the call upon him, and sudden was his answer to the call. He saw, he heard, he comprehended, the ruin that was coming down : already its gloomy shadow darkened above him ; and already he was measuring his strength to deal with it. Ah ! what a vulgar thing does courage seem when we see nations buying it and selling it for a shilling a-day : ah ! what a sublime thing does courage seem when some fearful summons on the great deeps of life carries a man, as if running before a hurricane, up to the giddy crest of some tumultuous crisis from which lie two courses, and a voice says to him audibly, "One way lies hope ; take the other, and mourn for ever !" How grand a triumph if, even then, amidst the raving of all around him, and the frenzy of the danger, the man is able to confront his situation—is able to retire for a moment into solitude with God, and to seek his counsel from *Him* !

For seven seconds, it might be, of his seventy, the stranger settled his countenance stedfastly upon us, as if to search and value every element in the conflict before him. For five seconds more of his seventy he sat immovably, like one that mused on some great purpose. For five more, perhaps, he sat with eyes upraised, like one that prayed in sorrow, under some extremity of doubt, for light that should guide him to the better choice. Then suddenly he rose ; stood upright ; and, by a powerful strain upon the reins, raising his horse's fore-feet from the ground, he slewed him round on the pivot of his hind-legs, so as to plant the little equipage in a position nearly at right angles to ours. Thus far his condition was not improved ; except as a first step had been taken towards the possibility of a second. If no more were done, nothing was done ; for the little carriage still occupied the very centre

of our path, though in an altered direction. Yet even now it may not be too late: fifteen of the seventy seconds may still be unexhausted; and one almighty bound may avail to clear the ground. Hurry, then, hurry! for the flying moments—*they* hurry. Oh, hurry, hurry, my brave young man! for the cruel hoofs of our horses—*they* also hurry! Fast are the flying moments, faster are the hoofs of our horses. But fear not for *him*, if human energy can suffice; faithful was he that drove to his terrific duty; faithful was the horse to *his* command. One blow, one impulse given with voice and hand, by the stranger, one rush from the horse, one bound as if in the act of rising to a fence, landed the docile creature's fore-feet upon the crown or arching centre of the road. The larger half of the little equipage had then cleared our over-towering shadow: *that* was evident even to my own agitated sight. But it mattered little that one wreck should float off in safety if upon the wreck that perished were embarked the human freightage. The rear part of the carriage—was *that* certainly beyond the line of absolute ruin? What power could answer the question? Glance of eye, thought of man, wing of angel, which of these had speed enough to sweep between the question and the answer, and divide the one from the other? Light does not tread upon the steps of light more indivisibly than did our all-conquering arrival upon the escaping efforts of the gig. *That* must the young man have felt too plainly. His back was now turned to us; not by sight could he any longer communicate with the peril; but, by the dreadful rattle of our harness, too truly had his ear been instructed that all was finished as regarded any effort of *his*. Already in resignation he had rested from his struggle; and perhaps in his heart he was whispering, "Father, which art in heaven, do Thou finish above what I on earth have attempted." Faster than ever mill-race we ran past them in our inexorable flight.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Among the many modifications of the original wording made by De Quincey in revising these paragraphs for the reprint in his *Collected Works* may be noted, as particularly characteristic, his substitution of this form of the present sentence for the original form; which was, "We ran past them faster than ever mill-race in our inexorable flight." His sensitiveness to fit sound, at such a moment of wild rapidity, suggested the inversion.—M.

Oh, raving of hurricanes that must have sounded in their young ears at the moment of our transit! Even in that moment the thunder of collision spoke aloud. Either with the swingle-bar, or with the haunch of our near leader, we had struck the off-wheel of the little gig; which stood rather obliquely, and not quite so far advanced as to be accurately parallel with the near-wheel. The blow, from the fury of our passage, resounded terrifically. I rose in horror, to gaze upon the ruins we might have caused. From my elevated station I looked down, and looked back upon the scene; which in a moment told its own tale, and wrote all its records on my heart for ever.

Here was the map of the passion that now had finished.<sup>1</sup> The horse was planted immovably, with his fore-feet upon the paved crest of the central road. He of the whole party might be supposed untouched by the passion of death. The little cany carriage—partly, perhaps, from the violent torsion of the wheels in its recent movement, partly from the thundering blow we had given to it—as if it sympathised with human horror, was all alive with tremblings and shiverings. The young man trembled not, nor shivered. He sat like a rock. But *his* was the steadiness of agitation frozen into rest by horror. As yet he dared not to look round; for he knew that, if anything remained to do, by him it could no longer be done. And as yet he knew not for certain if their safety were accomplished. But the lady——

But the lady——! Oh, heavens! will that spectacle ever depart from my dreams, as she rose and sank upon her seat, sank and rose, threw up her arms wildly to heaven, clutched at some visionary object in the air, fainting, praying, raving, despairing? Figure to yourself, reader, the elements of the case; suffer me to recall before your mind the circumstances of that unparalleled situation. From the silence and deep peace of this saintly summer night—from the pathetic blending of this sweet moonlight, dawnlight, dreamlight—from the manly tenderness of this flattering, whispering, mur-

<sup>1</sup> This sentence, "Here was the map," etc., is an insertion in the reprint; and one observes how artistically it causes the due pause between the horror as still in rush of transaction and the backward look at the wreck when the crash was past.—M.



muring love—suddenly as from the woods and fields—suddenly as from the chambers of the air opening in revelation—suddenly as from the ground yawning at her feet, leaped upon her, with the flashing of cataracts, Death the crowned phantom, with all the equipage of his terrors, and the tiger roar of his voice.

The moments were numbered ; the strife was finished ; the vision was closed. In the twinkling of an eye, our flying horses had carried us to the termination of the umbrageous aisle ; at the right angles we wheeled into our former direction ; the turn of the road carried the scene out of my eyes in an instant, and swept it into my dreams for ever.

### SECTION III.—DREAM-FUGUE :

FOUNDED ON THE PRECEDING THEME OF SUDDEN DEATH

“ Whence the sound  
Of instruments, that made melodious chime,  
Was heard, of harp and organ ; and who moved  
Their stops and chords was seen ; his volant touch  
Instinct through all proportions, low and high,  
Fled and pursued transverse the resonant fugue.”

*Par. Lost, Bk. XI.*

*Umultuosissimamente*

Passion of sudden death ! that once in youth I read and interpreted by the shadows of thy averted signs !<sup>1</sup>—rapture of panic taking the shape (which amongst tombs in churches I have seen) of woman bursting her sepulchral bonds—of woman’s Ionic form bending forward from the ruins of her grave with arching foot, with eyes upraised, with clasped adoring hands—waiting, watching, trembling, praying for the trumpet’s call to rise from dust for ever ! Ah, vision too fearful of shuddering humanity on the brink of almighty abysses !—vision that didst start back, that didst reel away,

<sup>1</sup> “*Averted signs*” :—I read the course and changes of the lady’s agony in the succession of her involuntary gestures ; but it must be remembered that I read all this from the rear, never once catching the lady’s full face, and even her profile imperfectly.

like a shrivelling scroll from before the wrath of fire racing on the wings of the wind! Epilepsy so brief of horror, wherefore is it that thou canst not die? Passing so suddenly into darkness, wherefore is it that still thou sheddest thy sad funeral blights upon the gorgeous mosaics of dreams? Fragment of music too passionate, heard once, and heard no more, what aileth thee, that thy deep rolling chords come up at intervals through all the worlds of sleep, and after forty years have lost no element of horror?

## I

Lo, it is summer—almighty summer! The everlasting gates of life and summer are thrown open wide; and on the ocean, tranquil and verdant as a savannah, the unknown lady from the dreadful vision and I myself are floating—she upon a fairy pinnacle, and I upon an English three-decker. Both of us are wooing gales of festal happiness within the domain of our common country, within that ancient watery park, within the pathless chase of ocean, where England takes her pleasure as a huntress through winter and summer, from the rising to the setting sun. Ah, what a wilderness of floral beauty was hidden, or was suddenly revealed, upon the tropic islands through which the pinnacle moved! And upon her deck what a bevy of human flowers: young women how lovely, young men how noble, that were dancing together, and slowly drifting towards *us* amidst music and incense, amidst blossoms from forests and gorgeous corymbi<sup>1</sup> from vintages, amidst natural carolling, and the echoes of sweet girlish laughter. Slowly the pinnacle nears us, gaily she hails us, and silently she disappears beneath the shadow of our mighty bows. But then, as at some signal from heaven, the music, and the carols, and the sweet echoing of girlish laughter—all are hushed. What evil has smitten the pinnacle, meeting or overtaking her? Did ruin to our friends couch within our own dreadful shadow? Was our shadow the shadow of death? I looked over the bow for an answer, and, behold! the pinnacle was dismantled; the revel and the revellers were found no more; the glory of the vintage was

<sup>1</sup> *Corymbus*, a cluster of fruit or flowers.—M.

dust ; and the forests with their beauty were left without a witness upon the seas. "But where," and I turned to our crew—"where are the lovely women that danced beneath the awning of flowers and clustering corymbi ? Whither have fled the noble young men that danced with *them* ?" Answer there was none. But suddenly the man at the mast-head, whose countenance darkened with alarm, cried out, "Sail on the weather beam ! Down she comes upon us : in seventy seconds she also will founder."

## II

I looked to the weather side, and the summer had departed. The sea was rocking, and shaken with gathering wrath. Upon its surface sat mighty mists, which grouped themselves into arches and long cathedral aisles. Down one of these, with the fiery pace of a quarrel from a cross-bow,<sup>1</sup> ran a frigate right athwart our course. "Are they mad ?" some voice exclaimed from our deck. "Do they woo their ruin ?" But in a moment, as she was close upon us, some impulse of a heady current or local vortex gave a wheeling bias to her course, and off she forged without a shock. As she ran past us, high aloft amongst the shrouds stood the lady of the pinnacle. The deeps opened ahead in malice to receive her, towering surges of foam ran after her, the billows were fierce to catch her. But far away she was borne into desert spaces of the sea : whilst still by sight I followed her, as she ran before the howling gale, chased by angry sea-birds and by maddening billows ; still I saw her, as at the moment when she ran past us, standing amongst the shrouds, with her white draperies streaming before the wind. There she stood, with hair dishevelled, one hand clutched amongst the tackling—rising, sinking, fluttering, trembling, praying ; there for leagues I saw her as she stood, raising at intervals one hand to heaven, amidst the fiery crests of the pursuing waves and the

<sup>1</sup> *Quarrel*, a cross-bow bolt, an arrow with a four-square head ; connected with *quadratus*, made square. Richardson's Dictionary gives this example from Robert Brunne —

"A quarrelle lete he flie,  
And smote him in the schank."—M.

raving of the storm ; until at last, upon a sound from afar of malicious laughter and mockery, all was hidden for ever in driving showers ; and afterwards, but when I know not, nor how,

### III

Sweet funeral bells from some incalculable distance, wailing over the dead that die before the dawn, awakened me as I slept in a boat moored to some familiar shore. The morning twilight even then was breaking ; and, by the dusky revelations which it spread, I saw a girl, adorned with a garland of white roses about her head for some great festival, running along the solitary strand in extremity of haste. Her running was the running of panic ; and often she looked back as to some dreadful enemy in the rear. But, when I leaped ashore, and followed on her steps to warn her of a peril in front, alas ! from me she fled as from another peril, and vainly I shouted to her of quicksands that lay ahead. Faster and faster she ran ; round a promontory of rocks she wheeled out of sight ; in an instant I also wheeled round it, but only to see the treacherous sands gathering above her head. Already her person was buried ; only the fair young head and the diadem of white roses around it were still visible to the pitying heavens ; and, last of all, was visible one white marble arm. I saw by the early twilight this fair young head, as it was sinking down to darkness—saw this marble arm, as it rose above her head and her treacherous grave, tossing, faltering, rising, clutching, as at some false deceiving hand stretched out from the clouds—saw this marble arm uttering her dying hope, and then uttering her dying despair. The head, the diadem, the arm—these all had sunk ; at last over these also the cruel quicksand had closed ; and no memorial of the fair young girl remained on earth, except my own solitary tears, and the funeral bells from the desert seas, that, rising again more softly, sang a requiem over the grave of the buried child, and over her blighted dawn.

I sat, and wept in secret the tears that men have ever given to the memory of those that died before the dawn, and by the treachery of earth, our mother. But suddenly

the tears and funeral bells were hushed by a shout as of many nations, and by a roar as from some great king's artillery, advancing rapidly along the valleys, and heard afar by echoes from the mountains. "Hush!" I said, as I bent my ear earthwards to listen—"hush!—this either is the very anarchy of strife, or else"—and then I listened more profoundly, and whispered as I raised my head—"or else, oh heavens! it is *victory* that is final, victory that swallows up all strife."

## IV

Immediately, in trance, I was carried over land and sea to some distant kingdom, and placed upon a triumphal car, amongst companions crowned with laurel. The darkness of gathering midnight, brooding over all the land, hid from us the mighty crowds that were weaving restlessly about ourselves as a centre: we heard them, but saw them not. Tidings had arrived, within an hour, of a grandeur that measured itself against centuries; too full of pathos they were, too full of joy, to utter themselves by other language than by tears, by restless anthems, and *Te Deums* reverberated from the choirs and orchestras of earth. These tidings we that sat upon the laurelled car had it for our privilege to publish amongst all nations. And already, by signs audible through the darkness, by snortings and tramlings, our angry horses, that knew no fear of fleshly weariness, upbraided us with delay. Wherefore *was* it that we delayed? We waited for a secret word, that should bear witness to the hope of nations as now accomplished for ever. At midnight the secret word arrived; which word was—*Waterloo and Recovered Christendom!* The dreadful word shone by its own light; before us it went; high above our leaders' heads it rode, and spread a golden light over the paths which we traversed. Every city, at the presence of the secret word, threw open its gates. The rivers were conscious as we crossed. All the forests, as we ran along their margins, shivered in homage to the secret word. And the darkness comprehended it.

Two hours after midnight we approached a mighty Minster. Its gates, which rose to the clouds, were closed.

But, when the dreadful word that rode before us reached them with its golden light, silently they moved back upon their hinges ; and at a flying gallop our equipage entered the grand aisle of the cathedral. Headlong was our pace ; and at every altar, in the little chapels and oratories to the right hand and left of our course, the lamps, dying or sickening, kindled anew in sympathy with the secret word that was flying past. Forty leagues we might have run in the cathedral, and as yet no strength of morning light had reached us, when before us we saw the aerial galleries of organ and choir. Every pinnacle of the fretwork, every station of advantage amongst the traceries, was crested by white-robed choristers that sang deliverance ; that wept no more tears, as once their fathers had wept ; but at intervals that sang together to the generations, saying,

“Chant the deliverer’s praise in every tongue,”

and receiving answers from afar,

“Such as once in heaven and earth were sung.”

And of their chanting was no end ; of our headlong pace was neither pause nor slackening.

Thus as we ran like torrents—thus as we swept with bridal rapture over the Campo Santo<sup>1</sup> of the cathedral graves—suddenly we became aware of a vast necropolis rising upon the far-off horizon—a city of sepulchres, built within the saintly cathedral for the warrior dead that rested from their feuds on earth. Of purple granite was the necropolis ; yet, in the first minute, it lay like a purple stain

<sup>1</sup> “*Campo Santo*” :—It is probable that most of my readers will be acquainted with the history of the Campo Santo (or cemetery) at Pisa, composed of earth brought from Jerusalem from a bed of sanctity, as the highest prize which the noble piety of crusaders could ask or imagine. To readers who are unacquainted with England, or who (being English) are yet unacquainted with the cathedral cities of England, it may be right to mention that the graves within-side the cathedrals often form a flat pavement over which carriages and horses *might* run ; and perhaps a boyish remembrance of one particular cathedral, across which I had seen passengers walk and burdens carried, as about two centuries back they were through the middle of St. Paul’s in London, may have assisted my dream.

upon the horizon, so mighty was the distance. In the second minute it trembled through many changes, growing into terraces and towers of wondrous altitude, so mighty was the pace. In the third minute already, with our dreadful gallop, we were entering its suburbs. Vast sarcophagi rose on every side, having towers and turrets that, upon the limits of the central aisle, strode forward with haughty intrusion, that ran back with mighty shadows into answering recesses. Every sarcophagus showed many bas-reliefs—bas-reliefs of battles and of battle-fields; battles from forgotten ages, battles from yesterday; battle-fields that, long since, nature had healed and reconciled to herself with the sweet oblivion of flowers; battle-fields that were yet angry and crimson with carnage. Where the terraces ran, there did *we* run; where the towers curved, there did *we* curve. With the flight of swallows our horses swept round every angle. Like rivers in flood wheeling round headlands, like hurricanes that ride into the secrets of forests, faster than ever light unwove the mazes of darkness, our flying equipage carried earthly passions, kindled warrior instincts, amongst the dust that lay around us—dust oftentimes of our noble fathers that had slept in God from Créci to Trafalgar. And now had we reached the last sarcophagus, now were we abreast of the last bas-relief, already had we recovered the arrow-like flight of the illimitable central aisle, when coming up this aisle to meet us we beheld afar off a female child, that rode in a carriage as frail as flowers. The mists which went before her hid the fawns that drew her, but could not hide the shells and tropic flowers with which she played—but could not hide the lovely smiles by which she uttered her trust in the mighty cathedral, and in the cherubim that looked down upon her from the mighty shafts of its pillars. Face to face she was meeting us; face to face she rode, as if danger there were none. “Oh, baby!” I exclaimed, “shalt thou be the ransom for Waterloo? Must we, that carry tidings of great joy to every people, be messengers of ruin to thee!” In horror I rose at the thought; but then also, in horror at the thought, rose one that was sculptured on a bas-relief—a Dying Trumpeter. Solemnly from the field of battle he rose to his feet; and, unslinging his stony trumpet,

carried it, in his dying anguish, to his stony lips—sounding once, and yet once again; proclamation that, in *thy* ears, oh baby! spoke from the battlements of death. Immediately deep shadows fell between us, and aboriginal silence. The choir had ceased to sing. The hoofs of our horses, the dreadful rattle of our harness, the groaning of our wheels, alarmed the graves no more. By horror the bas-relief had been unlocked unto life. By horror we, that were so full of life, we men and our horses, with their fiery fore-legs rising in mid air to their everlasting gallop, were frozen to a bas-relief. Then a third time the trumpet sounded; the seals were taken off all pulses; life, and the frenzy of life, tore into their channels again; again the choir burst forth in sunny grandeur, as from the muffling of storms and darkness; again the thunderings of our horses carried temptation into the graves. One cry burst from our lips, as the clouds, drawing off from the aisle, showed it empty before us.—“Whither has the infant fled?—is the young child caught up to God?” Lo! afar off, in a vast recess, rose three mighty windows to the clouds; and on a level with their summits, at height insuperable to man, rose an altar of purest alabaster. On its eastern face was trembling a crimson glory. A glory was it from the reddening dawn that now streamed *through* the windows? Was it from the crimson robes of the martyrs painted *on* the windows? Was it from the bloody bas-reliefs of earth? There, suddenly, within that crimson radiance, rose the apparition of a woman’s head, and then of a woman’s figure. The child it was—grown up to woman’s height. Clinging to the horns of the altar, voiceless she stood—sinking, rising, raving, despairing; and behind the volume of incense that, night and day, streamed upwards from the altar, dimly was seen the fiery font, and the shadow of that dreadful being who should have baptized her with the baptism of death. But by her side was kneeling her better angel, that hid his face with wings; that wept and pleaded for *her*; that prayed when *she* could *not*; that fought with Heaven by tears for *her* deliverance; which also, as he raised his immortal countenance from his wings, I saw, by the glory in his eye, that from Heaven he had won at last.



## V

Then was completed the passion of the mighty fugue. The golden tubes of the organ, which as yet had but muttered at intervals—gleaming amongst clouds and surges of incense—threw up, as from fountains unfathomable, columns of heart-shattering music. Choir and anti-choir were filling fast with unknown voices. Thou also, Dying Trumpeter, with thy love that was victorious, and thy anguish that was finishing, didst enter the tumult; trumpet and echo—farewell love, and farewell anguish—rang through the dreadful *sanctus*. Oh, darkness of the grave! that from the crimson altar and from the fiery font wert visited and searched by the effulgence in the angel's eye—were these indeed thy children? Pumps of life, that, from the burials of centuries, rose again to the voice of perfect joy, did ye indeed mingle with the festivals of Death? Lo! as I looked back for seventy leagues through the mighty cathedral, I saw the quick and the dead that sang together to God, together that sang to the generations of man. All the hosts of jubilation, like armies that ride in pursuit, moved with one step. Us, that, with laurelled heads, were passing from the cathedral, they overtook, and, as with a garment, they wrapped us round with thunders greater than our own. As brothers we moved together; to the dawn that advanced, to the stars that fled; rendering thanks to God in the highest—that, having hid His face through one generation behind thick clouds of War, once again was ascending, from the Campo Santo of Waterloo was ascending, in the visions of Peace; rendering thanks for thee, young girl! whom having overshadowed with His ineffable passion of death, suddenly did God relent, suffered thy angel to turn aside His arm, and even in thee, sister unknown! shown to me for a moment only to be hidden for ever, found an occasion to glorify His goodness. A thousand times, amongst the phantoms of sleep, have I seen thee entering the gates of the golden dawn, with the secret word riding before thee, with the armies of the grave behind thee,—seen thee sinking, rising, raving, despairing; a thousand times in the worlds of sleep have seen thee followed by God's angel through

storms, through desert seas, through the darkness of quicksands, through dreams and the dreadful revelations that are in dreams ; only that at the last, with one sling of His victorious arm, He might snatch thee back from ruin, and might emblazon in thy deliverance the endless resurrections of His love !

## AUTHOR'S POSTSCRIPT<sup>1</sup>

“THE ENGLISH MAIL-COACH.”—This little paper, according to my original intention, formed part of the “*Suspiria de Profundis*”; from which, for a momentary purpose, I did not scruple to detach it, and to publish it apart, as sufficiently intelligible even when dislocated from its place in a larger whole. To my surprise, however, one or two critics, not carelessly in conversation, but deliberately in print, professed their inability to apprehend the meaning of the whole, or to follow the links of the connexion between its several parts. I am myself as little able to understand where the difficulty lies, or to detect any lurking obscurity, as these critics found themselves to unravel my logic. Possibly I may not be an indifferent and neutral judge in such a case. I will therefore sketch a brief abstract of the little paper according to my original design, and then leave the reader to judge how far this design is kept in sight through the actual execution.

Thirty-seven years ago, or rather more, accident made me, in the dead of night, and of a night memorably solemn, the solitary witness of an appalling scene, which threatened instant death in a shape the most terrific to two young people whom I had no means of assisting, except in so far as I was able to give them a most hurried warning of their danger; but even *that* not until they stood within the very shadow of

<sup>1</sup> What is now printed properly as a “Postscript” was printed by De Quincey himself as a portion of the Preface which he prefixed in 1854 to the volume of his Collected Writings containing *The English Mail-Coach*.—M.

the catastrophe, being divided from the most frightful of deaths by scarcely more, if more at all, than seventy seconds.

Such was the scene, such in its outline, from which the whole of this paper radiates as a natural expansion. This scene is circumstantially narrated in Section the Second, entitled "The Vision of Sudden Death."

But a movement of horror, and of spontaneous recoil from this dreadful scene, naturally carried the whole of that scene, raised and idealised, into my dreams, and very soon into a rolling succession of dreams. The actual scene, as looked down upon from the box of the mail, was transformed into a dream, as tumultuous and changing as a musical fugue. This troubled dream is circumstantially reported in Section the Third, entitled "Dream-Fugue on the theme of Sudden Death." What I had beheld from my seat upon the mail,—the scenical strife of action and passion, of anguish and fear, as I had there witnessed them moving in ghostly silence,—this duel between life and death narrowing itself to a point of such exquisite evanescence as the collision neared: all these elements of the scene blended, under the law of association, with the previous and permanent features of distinction investing the mail itself; which features at that time lay—1st, in velocity unprecedented, 2dly, in the power and beauty of the horses, 3dly, in the official connexion with the government of a great nation, and, 4thly, in the function, almost a consecrated function, of publishing and diffusing through the land the great political events, and especially the great battles, during a conflict of unparalleled grandeur. These honorary distinctions are all described circumstantially in the First or introductory Section ("The Glory of Motion"). The three first were distinctions maintained at all times; but the fourth and grandest belonged exclusively to the war with Napoleon; and this it was which most naturally introduced Waterloo into the dream. Waterloo, I understand, was the particular feature of the "Dream-Fugue" which my censors were least able to account for. Yet surely Waterloo, which, in common with every other great battle, it had been our special privilege to publish over all the land, most naturally entered the dream under the licence of our privilege. If not—if there be anything amiss—let the Dream be responsible.

The Dream is a law to itself; and as well quarrel with a rainbow for showing, or for *not* showing, a secondary arch. So far as I know, every element in the shifting movements of the Dream derived itself either primarily from the incidents of the actual scene, or from secondary features associated with the mail. For example, the cathedral aisle derived itself from the mimic combination of features which grouped themselves together at the point of approaching collision—viz. an arrow-like section of the road, six hundred yards long, under the solemn lights described, with lofty trees meeting overhead in arches. The guard's horn, again—a humble instrument in itself—was yet glorified as the organ of publication for so many great national events. And the incident of the Dying Trumpeter, who rises from a marble bas-relief, and carries a marble trumpet to his marble lips for the purpose of warning the female infant, was doubtless secretly suggested by my own imperfect effort to seize the guard's horn, and to blow a warning blast. But the Dream knows best; and the Dream, I say again, is the responsible party.

## JOAN OF ARC<sup>1</sup>

WHAT is to be thought of *her*? What is to be thought of the poor shepherd girl from the hills and forests of Lorraine, that—like the Hebrew shepherd boy from the hills and forests of Judea—rose suddenly out of the quiet, out of the safety, out of the religious inspiration, rooted in deep pastoral solitudes, to a station in the van of armies, and to the more perilous station at the right hand of kings? The Hebrew boy inaugurated his patriotic mission by an *act*, by a victorious *act*, such as no man could deny. But so did the girl of Lorraine, if we read her story as it was read by those

<sup>1</sup> “*Arc*” :—Modern France, that should know a great deal better than myself, insists that the name is not D’Arc—*i.e.* of Arc—but *Darc*. Now it happens sometimes that, if a person whose position guarantees his access to the best information will content himself with gloomy dogmatism, striking the table with his fist, and saying in a terrific voice “It *is* so, and there’s an end of it,” one bows deferentially, and submits. But, if, unhappily for himself, won by this docility, he relents too amiably into reasons and arguments, probably one raises an insurrection against him that may never be crushed; for in the fields of logic one can skirmish, perhaps, as well as he. Had he confined himself to dogmatism, he would have entrenched his position in darkness, and have hidden his own vulnerable points. But, coming down to base reasons, he lets in light, and one sees where to plant the blows. Now, the worshipful reason of modern France for disturbing the old received spelling is that Jean Hordal, a descendant of *La Pucelle’s* brother, spelled the name *Darc* in 1612. But what of that? It is notorious that what small matter of spelling Providence had thought fit to disburse amongst man in the seventeenth century was all monopolised by printers: now, M. Hordal was *not* a printer.

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who saw her nearest. Adverse armies bore witness to the boy as no pretender; but so they did to the gentle girl. Judged by the voices of all who saw them *from a station of good-will*, both were found true and loyal to any promises involved in their first acts. Enemies it was that made the difference between their subsequent fortunes. The boy rose to a splendour and a noonday prosperity, both personal and public, that rang through the records of his people, and became a by-word amongst his posterity for a thousand years, until the sceptre was departing from Judah. The poor, forsaken girl, on the contrary, drank not herself from that cup of rest which she had secured for France. She never sang together with the songs that rose in her native Domrémy as echoes to the departing steps of invaders. She mingled not in the festal dances at Vaucouleurs which celebrated in rapture the redemption of France. No! for her voice was then silent; no! for her feet were dust. Pure, innocent, noble-hearted girl! whom, from earliest youth, ever I believed in as full of truth and self-sacrifice, this was amongst the strongest pledges for *thy* truth, that never once—no, not for a moment of weakness—didst thou revel in the vision of coronets and honour from man. Coronets for thee! Oh no! Honours, if they come when all is over, are for those that share thy blood.<sup>1</sup> Daughter of Domrémy, when the gratitude of thy king shall awaken, thou wilt be sleeping the sleep of the dead. Call her, King of France, but she will not hear thee. Cite her by the apparitors to come and receive a robe of honour, but she will be found *en contumace*. When the thunders of universal France, as even yet may happen, shall proclaim the grandeur of the poor shepherd girl that gave up all for her country, thy ear, young shepherd girl, will have been deaf for five centuries. To suffer and to do, that was thy portion in this life; that was thy destiny; and not for a moment was it hidden from thyself. Life, thou saidst, is short; and the sleep which is in the grave is long; let me use that life, so transitory, for the glory of those heavenly dreams destined to comfort the sleep which is so long! This pure creature—pure from every suspicion of

<sup>1</sup> “*Those that share thy blood*”:—A collateral relative of Joanna's was subsequently ennobled by the title of *Du Lys*.

even a visionary self-interest, even as she was pure in senses more obvious—never once did this holy child, as regarded herself, relax from her belief in the darkness that was travelling to meet her. She might not prefigure the very manner of her death; she saw not in vision, perhaps, the aerial altitude of the fiery scaffold, the spectators without end on every road pouring into Rouen as to a coronation, the surging smoke, the volleying flames, the hostile faces all around, the pitying eye that lurked but here and there, until nature and imperishable truth broke loose from artificial restraints;—these might not be apparent through the mists of the hurrying future. But the voice that called her to death, *that* she heard for ever.

Great was the throne of France even in those days, and great was he that sat upon it: but well Joanna knew that not the throne, nor he that sat upon it, was for *her*; but, on the contrary, that she was for *them*; not she by them, but they by her, should rise from the dust. Gorgeous were the lilies of France, and for centuries had the privilege to spread their beauty over land and sea, until, in another century, the wrath of God and man combined to wither them; but well Joanna knew, early at Domrémy she had read that bitter truth, that the lilies of France would decorate no garland for *her*. Flower nor bud, bell nor blossom, would ever bloom for *her*!

But stay. What reason is there for taking up this subject of Joanna precisely in the spring of 1847? Might it not have been left till the spring of 1947, or, perhaps, left till called for? Yes, but it *is* called for, and clamorously. You are aware, reader, that amongst the many original thinkers whom modern France has produced one of the reputed leaders is M. Michelet. All these writers are of a revolutionary cast: not in a political sense merely, but in all senses; mad, oftentimes, as March hares; crazy with the laughing gas of recovered liberty; drunk with the wine-cup of their mighty Revolution, snorting, whinnying, throwing up their heels, like wild horses in the boundless Pampas, and running races of defiance with snipes, or with the winds, or with their own shadows, if they can find nothing else to challenge. Some



time or other I, that have leisure to read, may introduce *you*, that have not, to two or three dozen of these writers; of whom I can assure you beforehand that they are often profound, and at intervals are even as impassioned as if they were come of our best English blood. But now, confining our attention to M. Michelet, we in England—who know him best by his worst book, the book against priests, &c.—know him disadvantageously. That book is a rhapsody of incoherence. But his “History of France” is quite another thing. A man, in whatsoever craft he sails, cannot stretch away out of sight when he is linked to the windings of the shore by towing-ropes of History. Facts, and the consequences of facts, draw the writer back to the falconer’s lure from the giddiest heights of speculation. Here, therefore—in his “France”—if not always free from flightiness, if now and then off like a rocket for an airy wheel in the clouds, M. Michelet, with natural politeness, never forgets that he has left a large audience waiting for him on earth, and gazing upwards in anxiety for his return: return, therefore, he does. But History, though clear of certain temptations in one direction, has separate dangers of its own. It is impossible so to write a history of France, or of England—works becoming every hour more indispensable to the inevitably-political man of this day—without perilous openings for error. If I, for instance, on the part of England, should happen to turn my labours into that channel, and (on the model of Lord Percy going to Chevy Chase)

“A vow to God should make  
My pleasure in the Michelet woods  
Three summer days to take,”

probably, from simple delirium, I might hunt M. Michelet into *delirium tremens*. Two strong angels stand by the side of History, whether French History or English, as heraldic supporters: the angel of research on the left hand, that must read millions of dusty parchments, and of pages blotted with lies; the angel of meditation on the right hand, that must cleanse these lying records with fire, even as of old the draperies of *asbestos* were cleansed, and must quicken them into regenerated life. Willingly I acknowledge that no man

will ever avoid innumerable errors of detail ; with so vast a compass of ground to traverse, this is impossible ; but such errors (though I have a bushel on hand, at M. Michelet's service) are not the game I chase ; it is the bitter and unfair spirit in which M. Michelet writes against England. Even *that*, after all, is but my secondary object ; the real one is Joanna, the Pucelle d'Orleans for herself.

I am not going to write the history of *La Pucelle* : to do this, or even circumstantially to report the history of her persecution and bitter death, of her struggle with false witnesses and with ensnaring judges, it would be necessary to have before us *all* the documents, and therefore the collection only now forthcoming in Paris.<sup>1</sup> But *my* purpose is narrower. There have been great thinkers, disdaining the careless judgments of contemporaries, who have thrown themselves boldly on the judgment of a far posterity, that should have had time to review, to ponder, to compare. There have been great actors on the stage of tragic humanity that might, with the same depth of confidence, have appealed from the levity of compatriot friends—too heartless for the sublime interest of their story, and too impatient for the labour of sifting its perplexities—to the magnanimity and justice of enemies. To this class belongs the Maid of Arc. The ancient Romans were too faithful to the ideal of grandeur in themselves not to relent, after a generation or two, before the grandeur of Hannibal. Mithridates, a more doubtful person, yet, merely for the magic perseverance of his indomitable malice, won from the same Romans the only real honour that ever he received on earth. And we English have ever shown the same homage to stubborn enmity. To work unflinchingly for the ruin of England ; to say through life, by word and by deed, *Delenda est Anglia Victrix* !—that one purpose of malice, faithfully pursued, has quartered some people upon our national funds of homage as by a perpetual annuity. Better than an inheritance of service rendered to

<sup>1</sup> “ *Only now forthcoming* ” :—In 1817 began the publication (from official records) of Joanna's trial. It was interrupted, I fear, by the convulsions of 1848 ; and whether even yet finished I do not know. [The reference seems to be to *Quicherat : Procès de condamnation et réhabilitation de Jeanne d'Arc*, in 5 volumes, Paris 1841-9.—M.]

England herself has sometimes proved the most insane hatred to England. Hyder Ali, even his son Tippoo, though so far inferior, and Napoleon, have all benefited by this disposition amongst ourselves to exaggerate the merit of diabolic enmity. Not one of these men was ever capable, in a solitary instance, of praising an enemy (what do you say to *that*, reader ?) ; and yet, in *their* behalf, we consent to forget, not their crimes only, but (which is worse) their hideous bigotry and anti-magnanimous egotism,—for nationality it was not. Suffren, and some half-dozen of other French nautical heroes, because rightly they did us all the mischief they could (which was really great), are names justly revered in England. On the same principle, La Pucelle d'Orleans, the victorious enemy of England, has been destined to receive her deepest commemoration from the magnanimous justice of Englishmen.

Joanna, as we in England should call her, but, according to her own statement, Jeanne (or, as M. Michelet asserts, Jean<sup>1</sup>) D'Arc, was born at Domrémy, a village on the marches of Lorraine and Champagne, and dependent upon the town of Vaucouleurs. I have called her a Lorrainer, not simply because the word is prettier, but because Champagne too odiously reminds us English of what are for *us* imaginary wines,—which, undoubtedly, *La Pucelle* tasted as rarely as we English : we English, because the Champagne of London is chiefly grown in Devonshire ; *La Pucelle*, because the Champagne of Champagne never, by any chance, flowed into

<sup>1</sup> “*Jean*” :—M. Michelet asserts that there was a mystical meaning at that era in calling a child *Jean* ; it implied a secret commendation of a child, if not a dedication, to St. John the evangelist, the beloved disciple, the apostle of love and mysterious visions. But, really, as the name was so exceedingly common, few people will detect a mystery in calling a *boy* by the name of Jack, though it *does* seem mysterious to call a girl Jack. It may be less so in France, where a beautiful practice has always prevailed of giving a boy his mother's name—preceded and strengthened by a male name, as *Charles Anne*, *Victor Victoire*. In cases where a mother's memory has been unusually dear to a son, this vocal memento of her, locked into the circle of his own name, gives to it the tenderness of a testamentary relique, or a funeral ring. I presume, therefore, that *La Pucelle* must have borne the baptismal name of Jeanne Jean ; the latter with no reference, perhaps, to so sublime a person as St. John, but simply to some relative.

the fountain of Domrémy, from which only she drank. M. Michelet will have her to be a *Champenoise*, and for no better reason than that she "took after her father," who happened to be a *Champenois*.

These disputes, however, turn on refinements too nice. Domrémy stood upon the frontiers, and, like other frontiers, produced a *mixed* race, representing the *cis* and the *trans*. A river (it is true) formed the boundary-line at this point—the river Meuse; and *that*, in old days, might have divided the populations; but in these days it did not: there were bridges, there were ferries, and weddings crossed from the right bank to the left. Here lay two great roads, not so much for travellers that were few, as for armies that were too many by half. These two roads, one of which was the great high road between France and Germany, *decussated* at this very point; which is a learned way of saying that they formed a St. Andrew's Cross, or letter X. I hope the compositor will choose a good large X; in which case the point of intersection, the *locus* of conflux and intersection for these four diverging arms, will finish the reader's geographical education, by showing him to a hair's-breadth where it was that Domrémy stood. These roads, so grandly situated, as great trunk arteries between two mighty realms,<sup>1</sup> and haunted for ever by wars or rumours of wars, *decussated* (for anything I know to the contrary) absolutely under Joanna's bedroom window: one rolling away to the right, past Monsieur D'Arc's old barn, and the other unaccountably preferring to sweep round that odious man's pig-sty to the left.

On whichever side of the border chance had thrown Joanna, the same love to France would have been nurtured. For it is a strange fact, noticed by M. Michelet and others, that the Dukes of Bar and Lorraine had for generations pursued the policy of eternal warfare with France on their own account, yet also of eternal amity and league with France in case anybody else presumed to attack her. Let peace settle upon France, and before long you might rely upon seeing the little vixen Lorraine flying at the throat of France. Let

<sup>1</sup> And reminding one of that inscription, so justly admired by Paul Richter, which a Russian Czarina placed on a guide-post near Moscow: *This is the road that leads to Constantinople.*

France be assailed by a formidable enemy, and instantly you saw a Duke of Lorraine insisting on having his own throat cut in support of France ; which favour accordingly was cheerfully granted to him in three great successive battles : twice by the English, viz. at Crécy and Agincourt, once by the Sultan at Nicopolis.

This sympathy with France during great eclipses, in those that during ordinary seasons were always teasing her with brawls and guerilla inroads, strengthened the natural piety to France of those that were confessedly the children of her own house. The outposts of France, as one may call the great frontier provinces, were of all localities the most devoted to the Fleurs de Lys. To witness, at any great crisis, the generous devotion to these lilies of the little fiery cousin that in gentler weather was for ever tilting at the breast of France, could not but fan the zeal of France's legitimate daughters : whilst to occupy a post of honour on the frontiers against an old hereditary enemy of France would naturally stimulate this zeal by a sentiment of martial pride, by a sense of danger always threatening, and of hatred always smouldering. That great four-headed road was a perpetual memento to patriotic ardour. To say "This way lies the road to Paris, and that other way to Aix-la-Chapelle ; this to Prague, that to Vienna," nourished the warfare of the heart by daily ministrations of sense. The eye that watched for the gleams of lance or helmet from the hostile frontier, the ear that listened for the groaning of wheels, made the high-road itself, with its relations to centres so remote, into a manual of patriotic duty.

The situation, therefore, *locally*, of Joanna was full of profound suggestions to a heart that listened for the stealthy steps of change and fear that too surely were in motion. But, if the place were grand, the time, the burden of the time, was far more so. The air overhead in its upper chambers was *hurting* with the obscure sound ; was dark with sullen fermenting of storms that had been gathering for a hundred and thirty years. The battle of Agincourt in Joanna's childhood had reopened the wounds of France. Crécy and Poitiers, those withering overthrows for the chivalry of France, had, before Agincourt occurred, been

tranquillised by more than half-a-century ; but this resurrection of their trumpet wails made the whole series of battles and endless skirmishes take their stations as parts in one drama. The graves that had closed sixty years ago seemed to fly open in sympathy with a sorrow that echoed their own. The monarchy of France laboured in extremity, rocked and reeled like a ship fighting with the darkness of monsoons. The madness of the poor king (Charles VI) falling in at such a crisis, like the case of women labouring in childbirth during the storming of a city, trebled the awfulness of the time. Even the wild story of the incident which had immediately occasioned the explosion of this madness—the case of a man unknown, gloomy, and perhaps maniacal himself, coming out of a forest at noonday, laying his hand upon the bridle of the king's horse, checking him for a moment to say, "Oh, king, thou art betrayed," and then vanishing, no man knew whither, as he had appeared for no man knew what—fell in with the universal prostration of mind that laid France on her knees, as before the slow unweaving of some ancient prophetic doom. The famines, the extraordinary diseases, the insurrections of the peasantry up and down Europe—these were chords struck from the same mysterious harp ; but these were transitory chords. There had been others of deeper and more ominous sound. The termination of the Crusades, the destruction of the Templars, the Papal interdicts, the tragedies caused or suffered by the house of Anjou, and by the Emperor—these were full of a more permanent significance. But, since then, the colossal figure of feudalism was seen standing, as it were on tiptoe, at Crécy, for flight from earth : that was a revolution unparalleled ; yet *that* was a trifle by comparison with the more fearful revolutions that were mining below the Church. By her own internal schisms, by the abominable spectacle of a double pope—so that no man, except through political bias, could even guess which was Heaven's vicegerent, and which the creature of Hell—the Church was rehearsing, as in still earlier forms she had already rehearsed, those vast rents in her foundations which no man should ever heal.

These were the loftiest peaks of the cloudland in the skies that to the scientific gazer first caught the colours of

the *new* morning in advance. But the whole vast range alike of sweeping glooms overhead dwelt upon all meditative minds, even upon those that could not distinguish the tendencies nor decipher the forms. It was, therefore, not her own age alone as affected by its immediate calamities that lay with such weight upon Joanna's mind, but her own age as one section in a vast mysterious drama, unweaving through a century back, and drawing nearer continually to some dreadful crisis. Cataracts and rapids were heard roaring ahead; and signs were seen far back, by help of old men's memories, which answered secretly to signs now coming forward on the eye, even as locks answer to keys. It was not wonderful that in such a haunted solitude, with such a haunted heart, Joanna should see angelic visions, and hear angelic voices. These voices whispered to her for ever the duty, self-imposed, of delivering France. Five years she listened to these monitory voices with internal struggles. At length she could resist no longer. Doubt gave way; and she left her home for ever in order to present herself at the dauphin's court.

The education of this poor girl was mean according to the present standard: was ineffably grand, according to a purer philosophic standard: and only not good for our age because for us it would be unattainable. She read nothing, for she could not read; but she had heard others read parts of the Roman martyrology. She wept in sympathy with the sad *Misereres* of the Romish Church; she rose to heaven with the glad triumphant *Te Deums* of Rome; she drew her comfort and her vital strength from the rites of the same Church. But, next after these spiritual advantages, she owed most to the advantages of her situation. The fountain of Domrémy was on the brink of a boundless forest; and it was haunted to that degree by fairies that the parish priest (*cure*) was obliged to read mass there once a-year, in order to keep them in any decent bounds. Fairies are important, even in a statistical view: certain weeds mark poverty in the soil; fairies mark its solitude. As surely as the wolf retires before cities does the fairy sequester herself from the haunts of the licensed victualler. A village is too much for her nervous delicacy: at most, she can tolerate a distant view of a hamlet.

We may judge, therefore, by the uneasiness and extra trouble which they gave to the parson, in what strength the fairies mustered at Domrémy, and, by a satisfactory consequence, how thinly sown with men and women must have been that region even in its inhabited spots. But the forests of Domrémy—those were the glories of the land: for in them abode mysterious powers and ancient secrets that towered into tragie strength. “Abbeys there were, and abbey windows,”—“like Moorish temples of the Hindoos,”—that exercised even princely power both in Lorraine and in the German Diets. These had their sweet bells that pierced the forests for many a league at matins or vespers, and each its own dreamy legend. Few enough, and scattered enough, were these abbeys, so as in no degree to disturb the deep solitude of the region; yet many enough to spread a network or awning of Christian sanctity over what else might have seemed a heathen wilderness. This sort of religious talisman being secured, a man the most afraid of ghosts (like myself, suppose, or the reader) becomes armed into courage to wander for days in their sylvan recesses. The mountains of the Vosges, on the eastern frontier of France, have never attracted much notice from Europe, except in 1813-14 for a few brief months, when they fell within Napoleon’s line of defence against the Allies. But they are interesting for this amongst other features, that they do not, like some loftier ranges, repel woods: the forests and the hills are on sociable terms. *Live and let live* is their motto. For this reason, in part, these tracts in Lorraine were a favourite hunting-ground with the Carlovingian princes. About six hundred years before Joanna’s childhood, Charlemagne was known to have hunted there. That, of itself, was a grand incident in the traditions of a forest or a chase. In these vast forests, also, were to be found (if anywhere to be found) those mysterious fawns that tempted solitary hunters into visionary and perilous pursuits. Here was seen (if anywhere seen) that ancient stag who was already nine hundred years old, but possibly a hundred or two more, when met by Charlemagne; and the thing was put beyond doubt by the inscription upon his golden collar. I believe Charlemagne knighted the stag; and, if ever he is met again by a king, he ought to be



made an earl, or, being upon the marches of France, a marquis. Observe, I don't absolutely vouch for all these things: my own opinion varies. On a fine breezy forenoon I am audaciously sceptical; but as twilight sets in my credulity grows steadily, till it becomes equal to anything that could be desired. And I have heard candid sportsmen declare that, outside of these very forests, they laughed loudly at all the dim tales connected with their haunted solitudes, but, on reaching a spot notoriously eighteen miles deep within them, they agreed with Sir Roger de Coverley that a good deal might be said on both sides.

Such traditions, or any others that (like the stag) connect distant generations with each other, are, for that cause, sublime; and the sense of the shadowy, connected with such appearances that reveal themselves or not according to circumstances, leaves a colouring of sanctity over ancient forests, even in those minds that utterly reject the legend as a fact.

But, apart from all distinct stories of that order, in any solitary frontier between two great empires,—as here, for instance, or in the desert between Syria and the Euphrates,—there is an inevitable tendency, in minds of any deep sensibility, to people the solitudes with phantom images of powers that were of old so vast. Joanna, therefore, in her quiet occupation of a shepherdess, would be led continually to brood over the political condition of her country by the traditions of the past no less than by the mementoes of the local present.

M. Michelet, indeed, says that La Pucelle was *not* a shepherdess. I beg his pardon: she *was*. What he rests upon I guess pretty well: it is the evidence of a woman called Haumette, the most confidential friend of Joanna. Now, she is a good witness, and a good girl, and I like her; for she makes a natural and affectionate report of Joanna's ordinary life. But still, however good she may be as a witness, Joanna is better; and she, when speaking to the dauphin, calls herself in the Latin report *Bergereta*. Even Haumette confesses that Joanna tended sheep in her girlhood. And I believe that, if Miss Haumette were taking coffee alone with me this very evening (February 12, 1847)—in which there would be no subject for scandal or for maiden blushes,

because I am an intense philosopher, and Miss H. would be hard upon four hundred and fifty years old—she would admit the following comment upon her evidence to be right. A Frenchman, about forty years ago,—M. Simond, in his “Travels,”—mentions accidentally the following hideous scene as one steadily observed and watched by himself in chivalrous France not very long before the French Revolution:—A peasant was ploughing; and the team that drew his plough was a donkey and a woman. Both were regularly harnessed: both pulled alike. This is bad enough; but the Frenchman adds that, in distributing his lashes, the peasant was obviously desirous of being impartial: or, if either of the yoke-fellows had a right to complain, certainly it was not the donkey.<sup>1</sup> Now, in any country where such degradation of females could be tolerated by the state of manners, a woman of delicacy would shrink from acknowledging, either for herself or her friend, that she had ever been addicted to any mode of labour not strictly domestic; because, if once owning herself a prædial servant, she would be sensible that this confession extended by probability in the hearer’s thoughts to the having incurred indignities of this horrible kind. Haumette clearly thinks it more dignified for Joanna to have been darning the stockings of her horny-hoofed father, Monsieur D’Arc, than keeping sheep, lest she might then be suspected of having ever done something worse. But, luckily, there was no danger of *that*: Joanna never was in service; and my opinion is that her father should have mended his own stockings, since probably he was the party to make the holes in them, as many a better man than D’Arc does,—meaning by *that* not myself, because, though probably a better man than D’Arc, I protest against doing anything of the kind. If I lived even with Friday in Juan Fernandez, either Friday must do all the darning, or else it must go undone. The better men that I meant were the sailors in the British navy, every man of whom mends his own stockings. Who else is to do it? Do you suppose, reader, that the junior lords of the admiralty are under articles to darn for the navy?

<sup>1</sup> De Quincey quotes this story more than once in the course of his writings.—M.

The reason, meantime, for my systematic hatred of D'Arc is this:—There was a story current in France before the Revolution, framed to ridicule the pauper aristocracy, who happened to have long pedigrees and short rent rolls: viz. that a head of such a house, dating from the Crusades, was overheard saying to his son, a Chevalier of St. Louis, "*Chevalier, as-tu donné au cochon à manger!*" Now, it is clearly made out by the surviving evidence that D'Arc would much have preferred continuing to say, "*Ma fille, as-tu donné au cochon à manger?*" to saying, "*Pucelle d'Orleans, as-tu sauvé les fleurs-de-lys?*" There is an old English copy of verses which argues thus:—

"If the man that turnips cries  
Cry not when his father dies,  
Then 'tis plain the man had rather  
Have a turnip than his father."

I cannot say that the logic of these verses was ever *entirely* to my satisfaction. I do not see my way through it as clearly as could be wished. But I see my way most clearly through D'Arc; and the result is—that he would greatly have preferred not merely a turnip to his father, but the saving a pound or so of bacon to saving the Oriflamme of France.

It is probable (as M. Michelet suggests) that the title of Virgin or *Pucelle* had in itself, and apart from the miraculous stories about her, a secret power over the rude soldiery and partisan chiefs of that period; for in such a person they saw a representative manifestation of the Virgin Mary, who, in a course of centuries, had grown steadily upon the popular heart.

As to Joanna's supernatural detection of the dauphin (Charles VII) amongst three hundred lords and knights, I am surprised at the credulity which could ever lend itself to that theatrical juggle. Who admires more than myself the sublime enthusiasm, the rapturous faith in herself, of this pure creature? But I am far from admiring stage artifices which not *La Pucelle*, but the court, must have arranged; nor can surrender myself to the conjurer's *legerdemain*, such as may be seen every day for a shilling. Southey's "Joan of Arc" was published in 1796. Twenty years after, talking with Southey, I was surprised to find him still owning a

secret bias in favour of Joan, founded on her detection of the dauphin. The story, for the benefit of the reader new to the case, was this:—*La Pucelle* was first made known to the dauphin, and presented to his court, at Chinon: and here came her first trial. By way of testing her supernatural pretensions, she was to find out the royal personage amongst the whole ark of clean and unclean creatures. Failing in this *coup d'essai*, she would not simply disappoint many a beating heart in the glittering crowd that on different motives yearned for her success, but she would ruin herself, and, as the oracle within had told her, would, by ruining herself, ruin France. Our own Sovereign Lady Victoria rehearses annually a trial not so severe in degree, but the same in kind. She “pricks” for sheriffs. Joanna pricked for a king. But observe the difference: our own Lady pricks for two men out of three; Joanna for one man out of three hundred. Happy Lady of the Islands and the Orient!—she *can* go astray in her choice only by one half: to the extent of one half she *must* have the satisfaction of being right. And yet, even with these tight limits to the misery of a boundless discretion, permit me, Liege Lady, with all loyalty, to submit that now and then you prick with your pin the wrong man. But the poor child from Domrémy, shrinking under the gaze of a dazzling court—not *because* dazzling (for in visions she had seen those that were more so), but because some of them wore a scoffing smile on their features—how should *she* throw her line into so deep a river to angle for a king, where many a gay creature was sporting that masqueraded as kings in dress! Nay, even more than any true king would have done: for, in Southey’s version of the story, the dauphin says, by way of trying the virgin’s magnetic sympathy with royalty,

“On the throne,  
I the while mingling with the menial throng,  
Some courtier shall be seated.”

This usurper is even crowned: “the jewelled crown shines on a menial’s head.” But, really, that is “*un peu fort*”; and the mob of spectators might raise a scruple whether our friend the jackdaw upon the throne, and the dauphin himself, were not grazing the shins of treason. For the dauphin

could not lend more than belonged to him. According to the popular notion, he had no crown for himself; consequently none to lend, on any pretence whatever, until the consecrated Maid should take him to Rheims. This was the *popular* notion in France. But certainly it was the dauphin's interest to support the popular notion, as he meant to use the services of Joanna. For, if he were king already, what was it that she could do for him beyond Orleans? That is to say, what more than a merely *military* service could she render him? And, above all, if he were king without a coronation, and without the oil from the sacred ampulla, what advantage was yet open to him by celerity above his competitor, the English boy? Now was to be a race for a coronation: he that should win *that* race carried the superstition of France along with him: he that should first be drawn from the ovens of Rheims was under that superstition baked into a king.

La Pucelle, before she could be allowed to practise as a warrior, was put through her manual and platoon exercise, as a pupil in divinity, at the bar of six eminent men in wigs. According to Southey (v. 393, Book III, in the original edition of his "Joan of Arc"), she "appalled the doctors." It's not easy to do *that*: but they had some reason to feel bothered, as that surgeon would assuredly feel bothered who, upon proceeding to dissect a subject, should find the subject retaliating as a dissector upon himself, especially if Joanna ever made the speech to them which occupies v. 354-391, B. III. It is a double impossibility: 1st, because a piracy from Tindal's "Christianity as old as the Creation"—a piracy *a parte ante*, and by three centuries; 2dly, it is quite contrary to the evidence on Joanna's trial. Southey's "Joan" of A.D. 1796 (Cottle, Bristol) tells the doctors, amongst other secrets, that she never in her life attended—1st, Mass; nor 2d, the Sacramental Table; nor 3d, Confession. In the meantime, all this deistical confession of Joanna's, besides being suicidal for the interest of her cause, is opposed to the depositions upon *both* trials. The very best witness called from first to last deposes that Joanna attended these rites of her Church even too often; was taxed with doing so; and, by blushing, owned the charge as a fact,

though certainly not as a fault. Joanna was a girl of natural piety, that saw God in forests, and hills, and fountains, but did not the less seek him in chapels and consecrated oratories.

This peasant girl was self-educated through her own natural meditateness. If the reader turns to that divine passage in "Paradise Regained" which Milton has put into the mouth of our Saviour when first entering the wilderness, and musing upon the tendency of those great impulses growing within himself—

"Oh, what a multitude of thoughts at once  
Awakened in me swarm, while I consider  
What from within I feel myself, and hear  
What from without comes often to my ears,  
Ill sorting with my present state compared !  
When I was yet a child, no childish play  
To me was pleasing ; all my mind was set  
Serious to learn and know, and thence to do,  
What might be public good ; myself I thought  
Born to that end"—

he will have some notion of the vast reveries which brooded over the heart of Joanna in early girlhood, when the wings were budding that should carry her from Orleans to Rheims ; when the golden chariot was dimly revealing itself that should carry her from the kingdom of *France Delivered* to the Eternal Kingdom.

It is not requisite for the honour of Joanna, nor is there in this place room, to pursue her brief career of *action*. That, though wonderful, forms the earthly part of her story ; the spiritual part is the saintly passion of her imprisonment, trial, and execution. It is unfortunate, therefore, for Southey's "Joan of Arc" (which, however, should always be regarded as a *juvenile* effort), that precisely when her real glory begins the poem ends. But this limitation of the interest grew, no doubt, from the constraint inseparably attached to the law of epic unity. Joanna's history bisects into two opposite hemispheres, and both could not have been presented to the eye in one poem, unless by sacrificing all unity of theme, or else by involving the earlier half, as a narrative episode, in the latter ; which, however, might have been done, for it might have been communicated to a fellow-prisoner, or a confessor, by Joanna herself. It is sufficient,

as concerns *this* section of Joanna's life, to say that she fulfilled, to the height of her promises, the restoration of the prostrate throne. France had become a province of England, and for the ruin of both, if such a yoke could be maintained. Dreadful pecuniary exhaustion caused the English energy to droop; and that critical opening *La Pucelle* used with a corresponding felicity of audacity and suddenness (that were in themselves portentous) for introducing the wedge of French native resources, for rekindling the national pride, and for planting the dauphin once more upon his feet. When Joanna appeared, he had been on the point of giving up the struggle with the English, distressed as they were, and of flying to the south of France. She taught him to blush for such abject counsels. She liberated Orleans, that great city, so decisive by its fate for the issue of the war, and then beleaguered by the English with an elaborate application of engineering skill unprecedented in Europe. Entering the city after sunset on the 29th of April, she sang mass on Sunday, May 8, for the entire disappearance of the besieging force. On the 29th of June she fought and gained over the English the decisive battle of Patay; on the 9th of July she took Troyes by a coup-de-main from a mixed garrison of English and Burgundians; on the 15th of that month she carried the dauphin into Rheims; on Sunday the 17th she crowned him; and there she rested from her labour of triumph. All that was to be *done* she had now accomplished: what remained was—to *suffer*.

All this forward movement was her own: excepting one man, the whole Council was against her. Her enemies were all that drew power from earth. Her supporters were her own strong enthusiasm, and the headlong contagion by which she carried this sublime frenzy into the hearts of women, of soldiers, and of all who lived by labour. Henceforwards she was thwarted; and the worst error that she committed was to lend the sanction of her presence to counsels which she had ceased to approve. But she had now accomplished the capital objects which her own visions had dictated. These involved all the rest. Errors were now less important; and doubtless it had now become more difficult for herself to pronounce authentically what *were* errors. The noble girl had

achieved, as by a rapture of motion, the capital end of clearing out a free space around her sovereign, giving him the power to move his arms with effect, and, secondly, the inappreciable end of winning for that sovereign what seemed to all France the heavenly ratification of his rights, by crowning him with the ancient solemnities. She had made it impossible for the English now to step before her. They were caught in an irretrievable blunder, owing partly to discord amongst the uncles of Henry VI, partly to a want of funds, but partly to the very impossibility which they believed to press with tenfold force upon any French attempt to forestall theirs. They laughed at such a thought; and, whilst they laughed, she *did* it. Henceforth the single redress for the English of this capital oversight, but which never *could* have redressed it effectually, was to vitiate and taint the coronation of Charles VII as the work of a witch. That policy, and not malice (as M. Michelet is so happy to believe), was the moving principle in the subsequent prosecution of Joanna. Unless they unhinged the force of the first coronation in the popular mind by associating it with power given from hell, they felt that the sceptre of the invader was broken.

But she, the child that, at nineteen, had wrought wonders so great for France, was she not elated? Did she not lose, as men so often *have* lost, all sobriety of mind when standing upon the pinnacle of success so giddy? Let her enemies declare. During the progress of her movement, and in the centre of ferocious struggles, she had manifested the temper of her feelings by the pity which she had everywhere expressed for the suffering enemy. She forwarded to the English leaders a touching invitation to unite with the French, as brothers, in a common crusade against infidels,—thus opening the road for a soldierly retreat. She interposed to protect the captive or the wounded; she mourned over the excesses of her countrymen; she threw herself off her horse to kneel by the dying English soldier, and to comfort him with such ministrations, physical or spiritual, as his situation allowed. “Nolcbat,” says the evidence, “uti cense suo, aut quemquam interficere.” She sheltered the English that invoked her aid in her own quarters. She wept as she beheld, stretched on the field of battle, so many brave enemies



that had died without confession. And, as regarded herself, her elation expressed itself thus :—On the day when she had finished her work, she wept ; for she knew that, when her *triumphal* task was done, her end must be approaching. Her aspirations pointed only to a place which seemed to her more than usually full of natural piety, as one in which it would give her pleasure to die. And she uttered, between smiles and tears, as a wish that inexpressibly fascinated her heart, and yet was half-fantastic, a broken prayer that God would return her to the solitudes from which he had drawn her, and suffer her to become a shepherdess once more. It was a natural prayer, because nature has laid a necessity upon every human heart to seek for rest and to shrink from torment. Yet, again, it was a half-fantastic prayer, because, from childhood upwards, visions that she had no power to mistrust, and the voices which sounded in her ear for ever, had long since persuaded her mind that for *her* no such prayer could be granted. Too well she felt that her mission must be worked out to the end, and that the end was now at hand. All went wrong from this time. She herself had created the *funds* out of which the French restoration should grow ; but she was not suffered to witness their development, or their prosperous application. More than one military plan was entered upon which she did not approve. But she still continued to expose her person as before. Severe wounds had not taught her caution. And at length, in a sortie from Compiègne (whether through treacherous collusion on the part of her own friends is doubtful to this day), she was made prisoner by the Burgundians, and finally surrendered to the English.

Now came her trial. This trial, moving of course under English influence, was conducted in chief by the Bishop of Beauvais. He was a Frenchman, sold to English interests, and hoping, by favour of the English leaders, to reach the highest preferment. *Bishop that art, Archbishop that shalt be, Cardinal that mayest be*, were the words that sounded continually in his ear ; and doubtless a whisper of visions still higher, of a triple crown, and feet upon the necks of kings, sometimes stole into his heart. M. Michelet is anxious to keep us in mind that this bishop was but an agent of the

English. True. But it does not better the case for his countryman that, being an accomplice in the crime, making himself the leader in the persecution against the helpless girl, he was willing to be all this in the spirit, and with the conscious vileness of a cat's-paw. Never from the foundations of the earth was there such a trial as this, if it were laid open in all its beauty of defence, and all its hellishness of attack. Oh, child of France! shepherdess, peasant girl! trodden under foot by all around thee, how I honour thy flashing intellect, quick as God's lightning, and true as God's lightning to its mark, that ran before France and laggard Europe by many a century, confounding the malice of the ensnarer, and making dumb the oracles of falsehood! Is it not scandalous, is it not humiliating to civilisation, that, even at this day, France exhibits the horrid spectacle of judges examining the prisoner against himself; seducing him, by fraud, into treacherous conclusions against his own head; using the terrors of their power for extorting confessions from the frailty of hope; nay (which is worse), using the blandishments of condescension and snaky kindness for thawing into compliances of gratitude those whom they had failed to freeze into terror? Wicked judges! barbarian jurisprudence!—that, sitting in your own conceit on the summits of social wisdom, have yet failed to learn the first principles of criminal justice,—sit ye humbly and with docility at the feet of this girl from Domrémy, that tore your webs of cruelty into shreds and dust. “Would you examine me as a witness against myself?” was the question by which many times she defied their arts. Continually she showed that their interrogations were irrelevant to any business before the court, or that entered into the ridiculous charges against her. General questions were proposed to her on points of casuistical divinity; two-edged questions, which not one of themselves could have answered, without, on the one side, landing himself in heresy (as then interpreted), or, on the other, in some presumptuous expression of self-esteem. Next came a wretched Dominican, that pressed her with an objection, which, if applied to the Bible, would tax every one of its miracles with unsoundness. The monk had the excuse of never having read the Bible. M. Michelet has no such excuse;

and it makes one blush for him, as a philosopher, to find him describing such an argument as "weighty," whereas it is but a varied expression of rude Mahometan metaphysics. Her answer to this, if there were room to place the whole in a clear light, was as shattering as it was rapid. Another thought to entrap her by asking what language the angelic visitors of her solitude had talked,—as though heavenly counsels could want polyglot interpreters for every word, or that God needed language at all in whispering thoughts to a human heart. Then came a worse devil, who asked her whether the Archangel Michael had appeared naked. Not comprehending the vile insinuation, Joanna, whose poverty suggested to her simplicity that it might be the *costliness* of suitable robes which caused the demur, asked them if they fancied God, who clothed the flowers of the valleys, unable to find raiment for his servants. The answer of Joanna moves a smile of tenderness, but the disappointment of her judges makes one laugh exultingly. Others succeeded by troops, who upbraided her with leaving her father; as if that greater Father, whom she believed herself to have been serving, did not retain the power of dispensing with his own rules, or had not said that for a less cause than martyrdom man and woman should leave both father and mother.

On Easter Sunday, when the trial had been long proceeding, the poor girl fell so ill as to cause a belief that she had been poisoned. It was not poison. Nobody had any interest in hastening a death so certain. M. Michelet, whose sympathies with all feelings are so quick that one would gladly see them always as justly directed, reads the case most truly. Joanna had a twofold malady. She was visited by a paroxysm of the complaint called *horie-sickness*. The cruel nature of her imprisonment, and its length, could not but point her solitary thoughts, in darkness and in chains (for chained she was), to Domrémy. And the season, which was the most heavenly period of the spring, added stings to this yearning. That was one of her maladies—*nostalgia*, as medicine calls it; the other was weariness and exhaustion from daily combats with malice. She saw that everybody hated her, and thirsted for her blood; nay, many kind-hearted creatures that would have pitied her profoundly, as

regarded all political charges, had their natural feelings warped by the belief that she had dealings with fiendish powers. She knew she was to die ; that was *not* the misery : the misery was that this consummation could not be reached without so much intermediate strife, as if she were contending for some chance (where chance was none) of happiness, or were dreaming for a moment of escaping the inevitable. Why, then, *did* she contend ? Knowing that she would reap nothing from answering her persecutors, why did she not retire by silence from the superfluous contest ? It was because her quick and eager loyalty to truth would not suffer her to see it darkened by frauds which *she* could expose, but others, even of candid listeners, perhaps, could not ; it was through that imperishable grandeur of soul which taught her to submit meekly and without a struggle to her punishment, but taught her *not* to submit—no, not for a moment—to calumny as to facts, or to misconstruction as to motives. Besides, there were secretaries all around the court taking down her words. That was meant for no good to *her*. But the end does not always correspond to the meaning. And Joanna might say to herself, “ These words that will be used against me to-morrow and the next day perhaps in some nobler generation may rise again for my justification.” Yes, Joanna, they *are* rising even now in Paris, and for more than justification !

Woman, sister, there are some things which you do not execute as well as your brother, man ; no, nor ever will. Pardon me if I doubt whether you will ever produce a great poet from your choirs, or a Mozart, or a Phidias, or a Michael Angelo, or a great philosopher, or a great scholar. By which last is meant—not one who depends simply on an infinite memory, but also on an infinite and electrical power of combination ; bringing together from the four winds, like the angel of the resurrection, what else were dust from dead men’s bones, into the unity of breathing life. If you *can* create yourselves into any of these great creators, why have you not ?

Yet, sister woman, though I cannot consent to find a Mozart or a Michael Angelo in your sex, cheerfully, and with the love that burns in depths of admiration, I acknowledge that you can do one thing as well as the best of us men—a

greater thing than even Milton is known to have done, or Michael Angelo: you can die grandly, and as goddesses would die, were goddesses mortal. If any distant worlds (which *may* be the case) are so far ahead of us Tellurians in optical resources as to see distinctly through their telescopes all that we do on earth, what is the grandest sight to which we ever treat them? St. Peter's at Rome, do you fancy, on Easter Sunday, or Luxor, or perhaps the Himalayas? Oh no! my friend: suggest something better; these are baubles to *them*; they see in other worlds, in their own, far better toys of the same kind. These, take my word for it, are nothing. Do you give it up? The finest thing, then, we have to show them is a scaffold on the morning of execution. I assure you there is a strong muster in those far telescopic worlds, on any such morning, of those who happen to find themselves occupying the right hemisphere for a peep at *us*. How, then, if it be announced in some such telescopic world by those who make a livelihood of catching glimpses at our newspapers, whose language they have long since deciphered, that the poor victim in the morning's sacrifice is a woman? How, if it be published in that distant world that the sufferer wears upon her head, in the eyes of many, the garlands of martyrdom? How, if it should be some Marie Antoinette, the widowed queen, coming forward on the scaffold, and presenting to the morning air her head, turned grey by sorrow,—daughter of Cæsars kneeling down humbly to kiss the guillotine, as one that worships death? How, if it were the noble Charlotte Corday, that in the bloom of youth, that with the loveliest of persons, that with homage waiting upon her smiles wherever she turned her face to scatter them—homage that followed those smiles as surely as the carols of birds, after showers in spring, follow the reappearing sun and the racing of sunbeams over the hills—yet thought all these things cheaper than the dust upon her sandals, in comparison of deliverance from hell for her dear suffering France! Ah! these were spectacles indeed for those sympathising people in distant worlds; and some, perhaps, would suffer a sort of martyrdom themselves, because they could not testify their wrath, could not bear witness to the strength of love and to the fury of hatred that

burned within them at such scenes, could not gather into golden urns some of that glorious dust which rested in the catacombs of earth.

On the Wednesday after Trinity Sunday in 1431, being then about nineteen years of age, the Maid of Arc underwent her martyrdom. She was conducted before mid-day, guarded by eight hundred spearmen, to a platform of prodigious height, constructed of wooden billets supported by occasional walls of lath and plaster, and traversed by hollow spaces in every direction for the creation of air-currents. The pile "struck terror," says M. Michelet, "by its height"; and, as usual, the English purpose in this is viewed as one of pure malignity. But there are two ways of explaining all that. It is probable that the purpose was merciful. On the circumstances of the execution I shall not linger. Yet, to mark the almost fatal felicity of M. Michelet in finding out whatever may injure the English name, at a moment when every reader will be interested in Joanna's personal appearance, it is really edifying to notice the ingenuity by which he draws into light from a dark corner a very unjust account of it, and neglects, though lying upon the high-road, a very pleasing one. Both are from English pens. Grafton, a chronicler, but little read, being a stiffnecked John Bull, thought fit to say that no wonder Joanna should be a virgin, since her "foule face" was a satisfactory solution of that particular merit. Holinshead, on the other hand, a chronicler somewhat later, every way more important, and at one time universally read, has given a very pleasing testimony to the interesting character of Joanna's person and engaging manners. Neither of these men lived till the following century, so that personally this evidence is none at all. Grafton sullenly and carelessly believed as he wished to believe; Holinshead took pains to inquire, and reports undoubtedly the general impression of France. But I cite the case as illustrating M. Michelet's candour.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Amongst the many ebullitions of M. Michelet's fury against us poor English are four which will be likely to amuse the reader; and they are the more conspicuous in collision with the justice which he sometimes does us, and the very indignant admiration which, under some aspects, he grants to us.

The circumstantial incidents of the execution, unless with more space than I can now command, I should be unwilling to relate. I should fear to injure, by imperfect report, a martyrdom which to myself appears so unspeakably grand. Yet, for a purpose, pointing not at Joanna, but at

1. Our English Literature he admires with some gnashing of teeth. He pronounces it "fine and sombre," but, I lament to add, "sceptical, Judaic, Satanic—in a word, antichristian." That Lord Byron should figure as a member of this diabolical corporation will not surprise men. It *will* surprise them to hear that Milton is one of its Satanic leaders. Many are the generous and eloquent Frenchmen, besides Chateaubriand, who have, in the course of the last thirty years, nobly suspended their own burning nationality, in order to render a more rapturous homage at the feet of Milton; and some of them have raised Milton almost to a level with angelic natures. Not one of them has thought of looking for him *below* the earth. As to Shakspeare, M. Michelet detects in him a most extraordinary mare's nest. It is this: he does "not recollect to have seen the name of God" in any part of his works. On reading such words, it is natural to rub one's eyes, and suspect that all one has ever seen in this world may have been a pure ocular delusion. In particular, I begin myself to suspect that the word "*la gloire*" never occurs in any Parisian journal. "The great English nation," says M. Michelet, "~~has one immense profound vice~~—to wit, "*pride*." Why, really that may be true; but we have a neighbour not absolutely clear of an "immense profound vice," as like ours in colour and shape as cherry to cherry. In short, M. Michelet thinks us, by fits and starts, admirable,—only that we are detestable; and he would adore some of our authors, were it not that so intensely he could have wished to kick them.

2. M. Michelet thinks to lodge an arrow in our sides by a very odd remark upon Thomas à Kempis: which is, that a man of any conceivable European blood—a Finlander, suppose, or a Zantiote—might have written Tom; only not an Englishman. Whether an Englishman could have forged Tom must remain a matter of doubt, unless the thing had been tried long ago. That problem was intercepted for ever by Tom's perverseness in choosing to manufacture himself. Yet, since nobody is better aware than M. Michelet that this very point of Kempis *having* manufactured Kempis is furiously and hopelessly litigated, three or four nations claiming to have forged his work for him, the shocking old doubt will raise its snaky head once more—whether this forger, who rests in so much darkness, might not, after all, be of English blood. Tom, it may be feared, is known to modern English literature chiefly by an irreverent mention of his name in a line of Peter Pindar's (Dr. Wolcot) fifty years back, where he is described as

"Kempis Tom,  
Who clearly shows the way to Kingdom Come."

Few in these days can have read him, unless in the Methodist version

M. Michelet—viz. to convince him that an Englishman is capable of thinking more highly of *La Pucelle* than even her admiring countrymen—I shall, in parting, allude to one or

of John Wesley. Amongst those few, however, happens to be myself; which arose from the accident of having, when a boy of eleven, received a copy of the “*De Imitatione Christi*” as a bequest from a relation who died very young; from which cause, and from the external prettiness of the book,—being a Glasgow reprint by the celebrated Foulis, and gaily bound,—I was induced to look into it, and finally read it many times over, partly out of some sympathy which, even in those days, I had with its simplicity and devotional fervour, but much more from the savage delight I found in laughing at Tom’s Latinity. *That*, I freely grant to M. Michelet, is inimitable. Yet, after all, it is not certain whether the original *was* Latin. But, however *that* may have been, if it is possible that M. Michelet<sup>1</sup> can be accurate in saying that there are no less than *sixty* French versions (not editions, observe, but separate versions) existing of the “*De Imitatione*,” how prodigious must have been the adaptation of the book to the religious heart of the fifteenth century! Excepting the Bible, but excepting *that* only in Protestant lands, no book known to man has had the same distinction. It is the most marvellous bibliographical fact on record.

3. Our English girls, it seems, are as faulty in one way as we English males in another. None of us men could have written the *Opera Omnia* of Mr. à Kempis; neither could any of our girls have assumed—male—attire like *La Pucelle*. But why? Because, says Michelet, English girls and German think so much of an *indecorum*. Well, that is a good fault, generally speaking. But M. Michelet ought to have remembered a fact in the martyrologies which justifies both parties—the French heroine for doing, and the general choir of English girls for *not* doing. A female saint, specially renowned in France, had, for a reason as weighty as Joanna’s—viz. expressly to shield her modesty amongst men—worn a male military harness. That reason and that example authorised *La Pucelle*; but our English girls, as a body, have seldom any such reason, and certainly no such saintly example, to plead. This excuses *them*. Yet, still, if it is indispensable to the national character that our young women should now and then trespass over the frontier of decorum, it then becomes a

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<sup>1</sup> “*If M. Michelet can be accurate*”:—However, on consideration, this statement does not depend on Michelet. The bibliographer Barbier has absolutely specified sixty in a separate dissertation, *soixante traductions*, amongst those even that have not escaped the search. The Italian translations are said to be thirty. As to mere *editions*, not counting the early MSS. for half-a-century before printing was introduced, those in Latin amount to two thousand, and those in French to one thousand. Meantime, it is very clear to me that this astonishing popularity, so entirely unparalleled in literature, could not have existed except in Roman Catholic times, nor subsequently have lingered in any Protestant land. It was the denial of Scripture fountains to thirsty lands which made this slender rill of Scripture truth so passionately welcome.



two traits in Joanna's demeanour on the scaffold, and to one or two in that of the bystanders, which authorise me in questioning an opinion of his upon this martyr's firmness.

patriotic duty in me to assure M. Michelet that we *have* such ardent females amongst us, and in a long series: some detected in naval hospitals when too sick to remember their disguise; some on fields of battle; multitudes never detected at all; some only suspected; and others discharged without noise by war offices and other absurd people. In our navy, both royal and commercial, and generally from deep remembrances of slighted love, women have sometimes served in disguise for many years, taking contentedly their daily allowance of burgo, biscuit, or cannon-balls—anything, in short, digestible or indigestible, that it might please Providence to send. One thing, at least, is to their credit: never any of these poor masks, with their deep silent remembrances, have been detected through murmuring, or what is nautically understood by “skulking.” So, for once, M. Michelet has an *erratum* to enter upon the fly-leaf of his book in presentation copies.

4. But the last of these ebullitions is the most lively. We English, at Orleans, and after Orleans (which is not quite so extraordinary, if all were told), fled before the Maid of Arc. Yes, says M. Michelet, you *did*: deny it, if you can. Deny it, *mon cher*? I don't mean to deny it. Running away, in many cases, is a thing so excellent that no philosopher would, at times, condescend to adopt any other step. All of us nations in Europe, without one exception, have shown our philosophy in that way at times. Even people “*qui ne se rendent pas*” have deigned both to run and to shout “*Sauve qui peut!*” at odd times of sunset; though, for my part, I have no pleasure in recalling unpleasant remembrances to brave men; and yet, really, being so philosophic, they ought *not* to be unpleasant. But the amusing feature in M. Michelet's reproach is the way in which he *improves* and varies against us the charge of running, as if he were singing a catch. Listen to him. They “*showed their backs*,” did these English. (Hip, hip, hurrah! three times three!) “*Behind good walls they let themselves be taken*.” (Hip, hip! nine times nine!) They “*ran as fast as their legs could carry them*.” (Hurrah! twenty-seven times twenty-seven!) They “*ran before a girl*”; they did. (Hurrah! eighty-one times eighty-one!) This reminds one of criminal indictments on the old model in English courts, where (for fear the prisoner should escape) the crown lawyer varied the charge perhaps through forty counts. The law laid its guns so as to rake the accused at every possible angle. Whilst the indictment was reading, he seemed a monster of crime in his own eyes; and yet, after all, the poor fellow had but committed one offence, and not always *that*. N.B.—Not having the French original at hand, I make my quotations from a friend's copy of Mr. Walter Kelly's translation; which seems to me faithful, spirited, and idiomatically English—liable, in fact, only to the single reproach of occasional provincialisms.

The reader ought to be reminded that Joanna D'Arc was subjected to an unusually unfair trial of opinion. Any of the elder Christian martyrs had not much to fear of *personal* rancour. The martyr was chiefly regarded as the enemy of Cæsar ; at times, also, where any knowledge of the Christian faith and morals existed, with the enmity that arises spontaneously in the worldly against the spiritual. But the martyr, though disloyal, was not supposed to be therefore anti-national ; and still less was *individually* hateful. What was hated (if anything) belonged to his class, not to himself separately. Now, Joanna, if hated at all, was hated personally, and in Rouen on national grounds. Hence there would be a certainty of calumny arising against *her*, such as would not affect martyrs in general. That being the case, it would follow of necessity that some people would impute to her a willingness to recant. No innocence could escape *that*. Now, had she really testified this willingness on the scaffold, it would have argued nothing at all but the weakness of a genial nature shrinking from the instant approach of torment. And those will often pity that weakness most who, in their own persons, would yield to it least. Meantime, there never was a calumny uttered that drew less support from the recorded circumstances. It rests upon no *positive* testimony, and it has a weight of contradicting testimony to stem. And yet, strange to say, M. Michelet, who at times seems to admire the Maid of Arc as much as I do, is the one sole writer amongst her *friends* who lends some countenance to this odious slander. His words are that, if she did not utter this word *recant* with her lips, she uttered it in her heart. "Whether she *said* the word is uncertain : but I affirm that she *thought* it."

Now, I affirm that she did not ; not in any sense of the word "*thought*" applicable to the case. Here is France calumniating *La Pucelle* : here is England defending her. M. Michelet can only mean that, on *a priori* principles, every woman must be presumed liable to such a weakness ; that Joanna was a woman ; *ergo*, that she was liable to such a weakness. That is, he only supposes her to have uttered the word by an argument which presumes it impossible for anybody to have done otherwise. I, on the contrary, throw

the *onus* of the argument not on presumable tendencies of nature, but on the known facts of that morning's execution, as recorded by multitudes. What else, I demand, than mere weight of metal, absolute nobility of deportment, broke the vast line of battle then arrayed against her? What else but her meek, saintly demeanour won, from the enemies that till now had believed her a witch, tears of rapturous admiration? "Ten thousand men," says M. Michelet himself — "ten thousand men wept"; and of these ten thousand the majority were political enemies knitted together by cords of superstition. What else was it but her constancy, united with her angelic gentleness, that drove the fanatic English soldier—who had sworn to throw a faggot on her scaffold, as *his* tribute of abhorrence, that *did* so, that fulfilled his vow — suddenly to turn away a penitent for life, saying everywhere that he had seen a dove rising upon wings to heaven from the ashes where she had stood? What else drove the executioner to kneel at every shrine for pardon to *his* share in the tragedy? And, if all this were insufficient, then I cite the closing act of her life as valid on her behalf, were all other testimonies against her. The executioner had been directed to apply his torch from below. He did so. The fiery smoke rose upwards in billowing volumes. A Dominican monk was then standing almost at her side. Wrapped up in his sublime office, he saw not the danger, but still persisted in his prayers. Even then, when the last enemy was racing up the fiery stairs to seize her, even at that moment did this noblest of girls think only for *him*, the one friend that would not forsake her, and not for herself; bidding him with her last breath to care for his own preservation, but to leave *her* to God. That girl, whose latest breath ascended in this sublime expression of self-oblivion, did not utter the word *recant* either with her lips or in her heart. No; she did not, though one should rise from the dead to swear it.

Bishop of Beauvais! thy victim died in fire upon a scaffold — thou upon a down bed. But, for the departing minutes of life, both are oftentimes alike. At the farewell crisis, when the gates of death are opening, and flesh is

resting from its struggles, oftentimes the tortured and the torturer have the same truce from carnal torment; both sink together into sleep; together both sometimes kindle into dreams. When the mortal mists were gathering fast upon you two, bishop and shepherd girl—when the pavilions of life were closing up their shadowy curtains about you—let us try, through the gigantic glooms, to decipher the flying features of your separate visions.

The shepherd girl that had delivered France—she, from her dungeon, she, from her baiting at the stake, she, from her duel with fire, as she entered her last dream—saw Domrémy, saw the fountain of Domrémy, saw the pomp of forests in which her childhood had wandered. That Easter festival which man had denied to her languishing heart—that resurrection of spring-time, which the darkness of dungeons had intercepted from *her*, hungering after the glorious liberty of forests—were by God given back into her hands, as jewels that had been stolen from her by robbers. With those, perhaps (for the minutes of dreams can stretch into ages), was given back to her by God the bliss of childhood. By special privilege for *her* might be created, in this farewell dream, a second childhood, innocent as the first; but not, like *that*, sad with the gloom of a fearful mission in the rear. This mission had now been fulfilled. The storm was weathered; the skirts even of that mighty storm were drawing off. The blood that she was to reckon for had been exacted; the tears that she was to shed in secret had been paid to the last. The hatred to herself in all eyes had been faced steadily, had been suffered, had been survived. And in her last fight upon the scaffold she had triumphed gloriously; victoriously she had tasted the stings of death. For all, except this comfort from her farewell dream, she had died—died, amidst the tears of ten thousand enemies—died, amidst the drums and trumpets of armies—died, amidst peals redoubling upon peals, volleys upon volleys, from the saluting clarions of martyrs.

Bishop of Beauvais! because the guilt-burdened man is in dreams haunted and waylaid by the most frightful of his crimes, and because upon that fluctuating mirror—rising (like the mocking mirrors of *mirage* in Arabian deserts) from the

fens of death—most of all are reflected the sweet countenances which the man has laid in ruins ; therefore I know, bishop, that you also, entering your final dream, saw Domrémy. That fountain, of which the witnesses spoke so much, showed itself to your eyes in pure morning dews : but neither dews, nor the holy dawn, could cleanse away the bright spots of innocent blood upon its surface. By the fountain, bishop, you saw a woman seated, that hid her face. But, as *you* draw near, the woman raises her wasted features. Would Domrémy know them again for the features of her child ? Ah, but *you* know them, bishop, well ! Oh, mercy ! what a groan was *that* which the servants, waiting outside the bishop's dream at his bedside, heard from his labouring heart, as at this moment he turned away from the fountain and the woman, seeking rest in the forests afar off. Yet not *so* to escape the woman, whom once again he must behold before he dies. In the forests to which he prays for pity, will he find a respite ? What a tumult, what a gathering of feet is there ! In glades where only wild deer should run armies and nations are assembling ; towering in the fluctuating crowd are phantoms that belong to departed hours. There is the great English Prince, Regent of France. There is my Lord of Winchester, the princely cardinal, that died and made no sign. There is the Bishop of Beauvais, clinging to the shelter of thickets. What building is that which hands so rapid are raising ? Is it a martyr's scaffold ? Will they burn the child of Domrémy a second time ? No : it is a tribunal that rises to the clouds ; and two nations stand around it, waiting for a trial. Shall my Lord of Beauvais sit again upon the judgment-seat, and again number the hours for the innocent ? Ah no ! he is the prisoner at the bar. Already all is waiting : the mighty audience is gathered, the Court is hurrying to their seats, the witnesses are arrayed, the trumpets are sounding, the judge is taking his place. Oh ! but this is sudden. My lord, have you no counsel ? “ Counsel I have none : in heaven above, or on earth beneath, counsellor there is none now that would take a brief from *me* : all are silent.” Is it, indeed, come to this ? Alas ! the time is short, the tumult is wondrous, the crowd stretches away into infinity ; but yet I will search in it for somebody

to take your brief: I know of somebody that will be your counsel. Who is this that cometh from Domrémy? Who is she in bloody coronation robes from Rheims? Who is she that cometh with blackened flesh from walking the furnaces of Rouen? This is she, the shepherd girl, counsellor that had none for herself, whom I choose, bishop, for yours. She it is, I engage, that shall take my lord's brief. She it is, bishop, that would plead for you: yes, bishop, SHE,—when heaven and earth are silent.



## INFANT LITERATURE<sup>1</sup>

"The child," says Wordsworth, "is father of the man"; thus calling into conscious notice the fact, else faintly or not at all perceived, that whatsoever is seen in the maturest adult, blossoming and bearing fruit, must have pre-existed by way of germ in the infant. Yes; all that is now broadly emblazoned in the man, once was latent—seen or not seen—as a vernal bud in the child. But not, therefore, is it true inversely—that all which pre-exists in the child finds its development in the man. Rudiments and tendencies, which *might* have found, sometimes by accidental, *do not* find, sometimes under the killing frost of counter forces *cannot* find, their natural evolution. Infancy, therefore, is to be viewed, not only as part of a larger world that waits for its final complement in old age, but also as a separate world itself; part of a continent, but also a distinct peninsula. Most of what he has, the grown-up man inherits from his infant self; but it does not follow that he always enters upon the whole of his natural inheritance.

Childhood, therefore, in the midst of its intellectual weakness, and sometimes even by means of this weakness, enjoys a limited privilege of strength. The heart in this season of life is apprehensive; and, where its sensibilities

<sup>1</sup> Chiefly a corrected and abridged reproduction of what had been the sixth of the series of articles contributed by De Quincey to *Hogg's Instructor* in 1851-52, under the general title of "A Sketch from Childhood." This particular article had there borne the sub-title "Literature of Infancy."—M.

are profound, is endowed with a special power of listening for the tones of truth—hidden, struggling, or remote: for, the knowledge being then narrow, the interest is narrow in the objects of knowledge: consequently the sensibilities are not scattered, are not multiplied, are not crushed and confounded (as afterwards they are) under the burden of that distraction which lurks in the infinite littleness of details.

That mighty silence which infancy is thus privileged by nature and by position to enjoy, co-operates with another source of power—almost peculiar to youth and youthful circumstances—which Wordsworth also was the first person to notice. It belongs to a profound experience of the relations subsisting between ourselves and nature—that not always are we called upon to seek; sometimes, and in childhood above all, we are sought.

“Think you, 'mid all this mighty sum  
Of things for ever speaking,  
That nothing *of itself* will come,  
But we must still be seeking?”

And again—

“Nor less I deem that there are pow'rs  
Which *of themselves* our minds impress;  
And we can feed this mind of ours  
In a wise passiveness.”

These cases of infancy, reached at intervals by special revelations, or creating for itself, through its privileged silence of heart, authentic whispers of truth, or beauty, or power, have some analogy to those other cases, more directly supernatural, in which (according to the old traditional faith of our ancestors) deep messages of admonition reached an individual through sudden angular deflexions of words, uttered or written, that had not been originally addressed to himself. Of these, there were two distinct classes—those where the person concerned had been purely passive, and, secondly, those in which he himself had to some extent co-operated. The first class have been noticed by Cowper the poet, and by George Herbert, the well-known pious brother of the still better known infidel, Lord Herbert (of Cherbury), in a memorable sonnet; scintillations they are of what seem nothing less than providential lights,



oftentimes arresting our attention, from the very centre of what else seems the blank darkness of chance and blind accident. "Books lying open, millions of surprises"—these are among the cases to which Herbert (and to which Cowper) alludes—books, that is to say, left casually open without design or consciousness, from which some careless passer-by, when throwing the most negligent of glances upon the page, has been startled by a solitary word, lying, as it were, in ambush, waiting and lurking for *him*, and looking at him steadily as an eye searching the haunted places in his conscience. These cases are in principle identical with those of the *second* class, where the inquirer himself co-operated, or was not entirely passive; cases such as those which the Jews called Bath-col, or daughter of a voice (the echo augury<sup>1</sup>)—viz., where a man, perplexed in judgment, and sighing for some determining counsel, suddenly heard from a stranger in some unlooked-for quarter words not meant for himself, but clamorously applying to the difficulty besetting him. In these instances, the mystical word, that carried a secret meaning and message to one sole ear in the world, was always unsought for: *that* constituted its virtue and its divinity; and to arrange means wilfully for catching at such casual words would have defeated the purpose. A well-known variety of augury, conducted upon this principle, lay in the "Sortes Biblicæ,"

<sup>1</sup> "Echo augury":—The daughter of a voice meant an echo, the original sound being viewed as the mother, and the reverberation, or secondary sound, as the daughter. Analogically, therefore, the direct and original meaning of any word, or sentence, or counsel, was the mother meaning; but the secondary, or mystical meaning, created by peculiar circumstances for one separate and peculiar ear, the daughter meaning, or echo meaning. This mode of augury, through secondary interpretations of chance words, is not, as some readers may fancy, an old, obsolete, or merely Jewish form of seeking the divine pleasure. About a century ago, a man so famous, and by repute so unsuperstitious, as Dr. Doddridge, was guided in a primary act of choice, influencing his whole after life, by a few chance words from a child reading aloud to his mother. With the other mode of augury—viz., that noticed by Herbert—where not the ear but the eye presides, catching at some word that chance has thrown upon the eye in some book left open by negligence, or opened at random by one's-self, Cowper the poet, and his friend Newton, with scores of others that could be mentioned, were made acquainted through practical results and personal experiences that in *their* belief were memorably important.

where the Bible was the oracular book consulted, and far more extensively at a later period in the "*Sortes Virgilianæ*,"<sup>1</sup> where the *Æneid* was the oracle consulted.

Something analogous to these spiritual transfigurations of a word or a sentence, by a bodily organ (eye or ear) that has been touched with virtue for evoking the spiritual echo lurking in its recesses, belongs, perhaps, to every impassioned mind for the kindred result of forcing out the peculiar beauty, pathos, or grandeur, that may happen to lodge (unobserved by ruder forms of sensibility) in special passages scattered up and down literature. Meantime, I wish the reader to understand that, in putting forward the peculiar power with which my childish eye detected a grandeur or a pomp of beauty not seen by others in some special instances, I am not arrogating more than it is lawful for every man the very humblest to arrogate—viz., an individuality of mental constitution so far applicable to special and exceptional cases as to reveal in *them* a life and power of beauty which others (and sometimes, which *all* others) had missed.

The first case belongs to the march (or boundary) line between my eighth and ninth years: the others to a period

<sup>1</sup> "*Sortes Virgilianæ*":—Upon what principle could it have been that Virgil was adopted as the oracular fountain in such a case? An author so limited even as to bulk, and much more limited as regards compass of thought and variety of situation or character, was about the worst that Pagan literature offered. But I myself once threw out a suggestion, which (if it is sound) exposes a motive in behalf of such a choice that would be likely to overrule the strong motives against it. That motive was, unless my whole speculation is groundless, the very same which led Dante, in an age of ignorance, to select Virgil as his guide in Hades. The seventh son of a seventh son has always traditionally been honoured as the depository of magical and other supernatural gifts. And the same traditional privilege attached to any man whose maternal grandfather was a sorcerer. Now it happened that Virgil's maternal grandfather bore the name of *Magus*. This, by the ignorant multitude in Naples, &c., who had been taught to reverence his tomb, was translated from its true acceptation as a proper name, to a false one as an appellative; it was supposed to indicate not the name, but the profession of the old gentleman. And thus, according to the belief of the Lazzaroni, that excellent Christian, P. Virgilius Maro, had stepped by mere succession and right of inheritance into his wicked old grandpapa's infernal powers and knowledge, both of which he exercised, doubtless, for centuries without blame, and for the benefit of the faithful.

earlier by two and a-half years. But I notice the latest case before the others, as it connected itself with a great epoch in the movement of my intellect. There is a dignity to every man in the mere historical assigning, if accurately he *can* assign, the first dawning upon his mind of any god-like faculty or apprehension, and more especially if that first dawning happened to connect itself with circumstances of individual or incommunicable splendour. The passage which I am going to cite first of all revealed to me the immeasurableness of the morally sublime. What was it, and where was it? Strange the reader will think it, and strange<sup>1</sup> it is, that a case of colossal sublimity should first emerge from such a writer as Phædrus the Æsopian fabulist. A great mistake it was, on the part of Doctor S., that the second book in the Latin language which I was summoned to study should have been Phædrus—a writer ambitious of investing the simplicity, or rather homeliness, of Æsop with aulic graces and satiric brilliancy. But so it was; and Phædrus naturally towered into enthusiasm when he had occasion to mention that the most intellectual of all races amongst men (viz., the Athenians) had raised a mighty statue to one who belonged to the same class in a social sense as himself (viz., the class of slaves), and rose above that class by the same intellectual power applying itself to the same object (viz., the moral apologue). These were the two lines in which that glory of the sublime, so stirring to my childish sense, seemed to burn as in some mighty pharos:—

“ Æsopo statuam ingentem posuere Attici;  
Servumque collocârunt eternâ in basi ”:

*A colossal statue did the Athenians raise to Æsop; and a poor pariah slave they planted upon an everlasting pedestal.* I have not scrupled to introduce the word pariah, because in that way only could I decipher to the reader by what particular avenue it was that the sublimity which I fancy in the passage reached my heart. This sublimity originated in the awful

<sup>1</sup> “*Strange*,” &c.:—Yet I remember that, in “The Pursuits of Literature”—a satirical poem once universally famous—the lines about Mnemosyne and her daughters, the Pierides, are cited as exhibiting matchless sublimity. Perhaps, therefore, if carefully searched, this writer may contain other jewels not yet appreciated.

chasm, in the abyss that no eye could bridge, between the pollution of slavery—the being a man, yet without right or lawful power belonging to a man—between this unutterable degradation and the starry altitude of the slave at that moment when, upon the unveiling of his everlasting statue, all the armies of the earth might be conceived as presenting arms to the emancipated man, the cymbals and kettle-drums of kings as drowning the whispers of his ignominy, and the harps of all his sisters that wept over slavery yet joining in one choral gratulation to the regenerated slave. I assign the elements of what I did in reality feel at that time, which to the reader may seem extravagant, and by no means of what it was reasonable to feel. But, in order that full justice may be done to my childish self, I must point out to the reader another source of what strikes me as real grandeur. Horace, that exquisite master of the lyre, and that most shallow of critics, it is needless to say that in those days I had not read. Consequently I knew nothing of his idle canon, that the opening of poems must be humble and subdued. But my own sensibility told me how much of additional grandeur accrued to these two lines as being the immediate and all-pompous *opening* of the poem. The same feeling I had received from the crashing overture to the grand chapter of Daniel—“Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords.” But, above all, I felt this effect produced in the two opening lines of “Macbeth” :—

“WHEN” (but watch that an emphasis of thunder dwells upon that word “when”)—

“WHEN shall we three meet again—  
In thunder, lightning, or in rain?”

What an orchestral crash bursts upon the ear in that all-shattering question. And one syllable of apologetic preparation, so as to meet the suggestion of Horace, would have the effect of emasculating the whole tremendous alarum. The passage in Phædrus differs thus far from that in “Macbeth,” that the first line, simply stating a matter of fact, with no more of sentiment than belongs to the word *ingentem*, and to the antithesis between the two parties so enormously divided—Esop the slave and the Athenians—must be read as an

*apoggiatura*, or hurried note of introduction, flying forward as if on wings to descend with the fury and weight of a thousand orchestras upon the immortal passion of the second line — “*Servumque collocârunt ETERNA IN BASI.*” This passage from Phædrus, which might be briefly designated *The Apotheosis of the Slave*, gave to me my first grand and jubilant sense of the moral sublime.

Two other experiences of mine of the same class had been earlier, and these I had shared with my sister Elizabeth. The first was derived from the “*Arabian Nights.*” Mrs. Barbauld, a lady now very nearly forgotten,<sup>1</sup> then filled a large space in the public eye; in fact, as a writer for children, she occupied the place from about 1780 to 1805 which, from 1805 to 1825, was occupied by Miss Edgeworth. Only, as unhappily Miss Edgeworth is also now very nearly forgotten, this is to explain *ignotum per ignotius*, or at least one *ignotum* by another *ignotum*. However, since it cannot be helped, this unknown and also most well-known woman, having occasion, in the days of her glory, to speak of the “*Arabian Nights,*” insisted on Aladdin, and secondly on Sinbad, as the two jewels of the collection. Now, on the contrary, my sister and myself pronounced Sinbad to be very bad, and Aladdin to be pretty nearly the worst, and upon grounds

<sup>1</sup> “*Very nearly forgotten*”: — Not quite, however. It must be hard upon eighty or eighty-five years since she first commenced authorship—a period which allows time for a great deal of forgetting: and yet, in the very week when I am revising this passage, I observe advertised a new edition, attractively illustrated, of the “*Evenings at Home*”—a joint work of Mrs. Barbauld and her brother (the elder Dr. Aikin). Mrs. Barbauld was exceedingly clever. Her mimicry of Dr. Johnson’s style was the best of all that exist. Her blank-verse “*Washing-Day,*” descriptive of the discomforts attending a mistimed visit to a rustic friend, under the affliction of a family-washing, is picturesquely circumstantiated. And her prose hymns for children have left upon my childish recollection a deep impression of solemn beauty and simplicity. Coleridge, who scattered his sneering compliments very liberally up and down the world, used to call the elder Dr. Aikin (allusively to Pope’s well-known line—

“No craving void left aching in the breast”)

*an aching void*; and the nephew, Dr. Arthur Aikin, by way of variety, *a void aching*. Whilst Mrs. Barbauld he designated as *that pleonasm of nakedness*; since, as if it were not enough to be *bare*, she was also *bald*.

that still strike me as just. For, as to Sinbad, it is not a story at all, but a mere succession of adventures, having no unity of interest whatsoever: and in Aladdin, after the possession of the lamp has been once secured by a pure accident, the story ceases to move. All the rest is a mere record of upholstery; how this saloon was finished to-day, and that window on the next day, with no fresh incident whatever, except the single and transient misfortune arising out of the advantage given to the magician by the unpardonable stupidity of Aladdin in regard to the lamp. But, whilst my sister and I agreed in despising Aladdin so much as almost to be on the verge of despising the queen of all the blue-stockings for so ill-directed a preference, one solitary section there was of that tale which fixed and fascinated my gaze, in a degree that I never afterwards forgot, and did not at that time comprehend. The sublimity which it involved was mysterious and unfathomable, as regarded any key which I possessed for deciphering its law or origin. Made restless by the blind sense which I had of its grandeur, I could not for a moment succeed in finding out *why* it should be grand. Unable to explain my own impressions in Aladdin, I did not the less obstinately persist in believing a sublimity which I could not understand. It was, in fact, one of those many important cases which elsewhere I have called *involute*s of human sensibility; combinations in which the materials of future thought or feeling are carried as imperceptibly into the mind as vegetable seeds are carried variously combined through the atmosphere, or by means of rivers, by birds, by winds, by waters, into remote countries. But the reader shall judge for himself. At the opening of the tale, a magician living in the central depths of Africa is introduced to us as one made aware by his secret art of an enchanted lamp endowed with supernatural powers available for the service of any man whatever who should get it into his keeping. But *there* lies the difficulty. The lamp is imprisoned in subterraneous chambers, and from these it can be released only by the hands of an innocent child. But this is not enough: the child must have a special horoscope written in the stars, or else a peculiar destiny written in his constitution, entitling him to take possession of the lamp. Where shall

such a child be found? Where shall he be sought? The magician knows: he applies his ear to the earth; he listens to the innumerable sounds of footsteps that at the moment of his experiment are tormenting the surface of the globe; and amongst them all, at a distance of six thousand miles, playing in the streets of Bagdad, he distinguishes the peculiar steps of the child Aladdin. Through this mighty labyrinth of sounds, which Archimedes, aided by his *arenarius*, could not sum or disentangle, one solitary infant's feet are distinctly recognised on the banks of the Tigris, distant by four hundred and forty days' march of an army or a caravan. These feet, these steps, the sorcerer knows, and challenges in his heart, as the feet, as the steps of that innocent boy, through whose hands only he could have a chance of reaching the lamp.

It follows, therefore, that the wicked magician exercises two demoniac gifts. First, he has the power to disarm Babel itself of its confusion. Secondly, after having laid aside as useless many billions of earthly sounds, and after having fastened his murderous<sup>1</sup> attention upon one insulated tread, he has the power, still more unsearchable, of reading in that hasty movement an alphabet of new and infinite symbols; for, in order that the sound of the child's feet should be significant and intelligible, that sound must open into a gamut of infinite compass. The pulses of the heart, the motions of the will, the phantoms of the brain, must repeat themselves in secret hieroglyphics uttered by the flying footsteps. Even the articulate or brutal sounds of the globe must be all so many languages and ciphers that somewhere have their corresponding keys—have their own grammar and syntax; and thus the least things in the universe must be secret mirrors to the greatest. Palmistry has something of the same dark sublimity. All this, by rude efforts at explanation that mocked my feeble command of words, I communicated to my sister; and she, whose sympathy with my meaning was always so quick and true, often outrunning electrically my imperfect expressions, felt the passage in the same way as myself,<sup>2</sup> but not, perhaps, in the same degree.

<sup>1</sup> “Murderous”; for it was his intention to leave Aladdin immured in the subterraneous chambers.

<sup>2</sup> The reader will not understand me as attributing to the Arabian

She was much beyond me in velocity of apprehension, and many other qualities of intellect. Here only, viz., on cases of the *dark* sublime, where it rested upon dim abstractions, and when no particular trait of *moral* grandeur came forward, we differed—differed, that is to say, as by more or by less. Else, even as to the sublime, and numbers of other intellectual questions which rose up to us from our immense reading, we drew together with a perfect fidelity of sympathy; and therefore I pass willingly from a case which exemplified one of our rare differences, to another, not less interesting for itself, which illustrated (what occurred so continually) the intensity of our agreement.

No instance of noble revenge that ever I heard of seems so effective, if considered as applied to a noble-minded wrongdoer, or in any case as so pathetic. From what quarter the story comes originally, was unknown to us at the time; and I have never met it since; so that possibly it may be new to the reader. We found it in a book written for the use of his own children by Dr. Percival, the physician who attended at Greenhay. Dr. P. was a literary man, of elegant tastes and philosophic habits. Some of his papers may be found in the "Manchester Philosophic Transactions"; and these I have heard mentioned with respect, though, for myself, I have no personal knowledge of them. Some presumption meantime arises in their favour, from the fact that he had been a favoured correspondent of the most eminent Frenchmen at that time who cultivated literature jointly with philosophy. Voltaire, Diderot, Maupertuis, Condorcet, and D'Alembert, had all treated him with distinction; and I have heard my mother say that, in days before I or my sister could have known him, he attempted vainly to interest her in these French luminaries, by reading extracts from their frequent letters; which, however, so far from reconciling her to the letters, or to the writers of the letters, had the unhappy

originator of Aladdin all the sentiment of the case as I have endeavoured to disentangle it. He spoke what he did not understand; for, as to sentiment of any kind, all Orientals are obtuse and impassive. There are other sublimities (some, at least) in the "Arabian Nights," which first became such—a gas that first kindles—when entering into combination with new elements in a Christian atmosphere.



effect of riveting her dislike (previously budding) to the doctor, as their receiver, and the *proneur* of their authors. The tone of the letters—hollow, insincere, and full of courtly civilities to Dr. P., as a known friend of “*the tolerance*” (meaning, of toleration)—certainly was not adapted to the English taste; and in this respect was specially offensive to my mother, as always assuming of the doctor that, by mere necessity, as being a philosopher, he must be an infidel. Dr. P. left that question, I believe, “*in medio*,” neither assenting nor denying; and undoubtedly there was no particular call upon him to publish his Confession of Faith before one who, in the midst of her rigorous politeness, suffered it to be too transparent that she did not like him. It is always a pity to see anything lost and wasted, especially love; and, therefore, it was no subject for lamentation, that too probably the philosophic doctor did not enthusiastically like *her*. But, if really so, that made no difference in his feelings towards my sister and myself. Us he *did* like; and, as one proof of his regard, he presented us jointly with such of his works as could be supposed interesting to two young literati, whose combined ages made no more at this period than a baker’s dozen. These presentation copies amounted to two at the least, both *octavos*, and one of them entitled *The Father’s—something or other*; what was it?—*Assistant*, perhaps. How much assistance the doctor might furnish to the fathers upon this wicked little planet I cannot say. But fathers are a stubborn race; it is very little use trying to assist *them*. Better always to prescribe for the rising generation. And certainly the impression which he made upon us—my sister and myself—by the story in question, was deep and memorable: my sister wept over it, and wept over the remembrance of it; and, not long after, carried its sweet aroma off with her to heaven; whilst I, for *my* part, have never forgotten it. Yet, perhaps, it is injudicious to have too much excited the reader’s expectations; therefore, reader, understand what it is that you are invited to hear—not much of a story, but simply a noble sentiment, such as that of Louis XII when he refused, as King of France, to avenge his own injuries as Duke of Orleans—such as that of Hadrian, when he said that a Roman Emperor ought to die standing,

meaning that Cæsar, as the man who represented almighty Rome, should face the last enemy, as the first, in an attitude of unconquerable defiance. Here is Dr. Percival's story, which (again I warn you) will collapse into nothing at all, unless you yourself are able to dilate it by expansive sympathy with its sentiment.

A young officer (in what army, no matter) had so far forgotten himself, in a moment of irritation, as to strike a private soldier, full of personal dignity (as sometimes happens in all ranks), and distinguished for his courage. The inexorable laws of military discipline forbade to the injured soldier any practical redress—he could look for no retaliation by acts. Words only were at his command; and, in a tumult of indignation, as he turned away, the soldier said to his officer that he would “make him repent it.” This, wearing the shape of a menace, naturally rekindled the officer's anger, and intercepted any disposition which might be rising within him towards a sentiment of remorse; and thus the irritation between the two young men grew hotter than before. Some weeks after this a partial action took place with the enemy. Suppose yourself a spectator, and looking down into a valley occupied by the two armies. They are facing each other, you see, in martial array. But it is no more than a skirmish which is going on; in the course of which, however, an occasion suddenly arises for a desperate service. A redoubt, which has fallen into the enemy's hands, must be recaptured at any price, and under circumstances of all but hopeless difficulty. A strong party has volunteered for the service; there is a cry for somebody to head them; you see a soldier step out from the ranks to assume this dangerous leadership; the party moves rapidly forward; in a few minutes it is swallowed up from your eyes in clouds of smoke; for one half-hour, from behind these clouds, you receive hieroglyphic reports of bloody strife—fierce repeating signals, flashes from the guns, rolling musketry, and exulting hurrahs, advancing or receding, slackening or redoubling. At length all is over: the redoubt has been recovered; that which was lost is found again; the jewel which had been made captive is ransomed with blood. Crimsoned with glorious gore, the wreck of the conquering party is relieved, and at liberty to return. From

the river you see it ascending. The plume-crested officer in command rushes forward, with his left hand raising his hat in homage to the blackened fragments of what once was a flag, whilst, with his right hand, he seizes that of the leader, though no more than a private from the ranks. *That* perplexes you not: mystery you see none in *that*. For distinctions of order perish, ranks are confounded, "high and low" are words without a meaning, and to wreck goes every notion or feeling that divides the noble from the noble, or the brave man from the brave. But wherefore is it that now, when suddenly they wheel into mutual recognition, suddenly they pause? This soldier, this officer—who are they? O reader! once before they had stood face to face—the soldier it is that was struck; the officer it is that struck him. Once again they are meeting; and the gaze of armies is upon them. If for a moment a doubt divides them, in a moment the doubt has perished. One glance exchanged between them publishes the forgiveness that is sealed for ever. As one who recovers a brother whom he had accounted dead, the officer sprang forward, threw his arms around the neck of the soldier, and kissed him, as if he were some martyr glorified by that shadow of death from which he was returning; whilst, on *his* part, the soldier, stepping back, and carrying his open hand through the beautiful motions of the military salute to a superior, makes this immortal answer—that answer which shut up for ever the memory of the indignity offered to him, even whilst for the last time alluding to it:—"Sir," he said, "I told you before that I would *make you repent it.*"

ON THE KNOCKING AT THE GATE  
IN MACBETH<sup>1</sup>

FROM my boyish days I had always felt a great perplexity on one point in *Macbeth*. It was this:—The knocking at the gate which succeeds to the murder of Duncan produced to my feelings an effect for which I never could account. The effect was that it reflected back upon the murderer a peculiar awfulness and a depth of solemnity; yet, however obstinately I endeavoured with my understanding to comprehend this, for many years I never could see *why* it should produce such an effect.

Here I pause for one moment, to exhort the reader never to pay any attention to his understanding when it stands in opposition to any other faculty of his mind. The mere understanding, however useful and indispensable, is the meanest faculty in the human mind, and the most to be distrusted; and yet the great majority of people trust to nothing else,—which may do for ordinary life, but not for philosophical purposes. Of this out of ten thousand instances that I might produce I will cite one. Ask of any person whatsoever who is not previously prepared for the demand by a knowledge of the perspective to draw in the rudest way the commonest appearance which depends upon the laws of that science,—as, for instance, to represent the effect of two

<sup>1</sup> Appeared originally in the *London Magazine* for October 1823 as one of the scraps in the series contributed to that magazine under the title "Notes from the Pocket-Book of a Late Opium-Eater"; reprinted in 1860 in the last or posthumous volume of De Quincey's edition of his *Collected Writings*. De Quincey had intended to enlarge it; but this was not done.—M.

walls standing at right angles to each other, or the appearance of the houses on each side of a street as seen by a person looking down the street from one extremity. Now, in all cases, unless the person has happened to observe in pictures how it is that artists produce these effects, he will be utterly unable to make the smallest approximation to it. Yet why? For he has actually seen the effect every day of his life. The reason is that he allows his understanding to overrule his eyes. His understanding, which includes no intuitive knowledge of the laws of vision, can furnish him with no reason why a line which is known and can be proved to be a horizontal line should not *appear* a horizontal line: a line that made any angle with the perpendicular less than a right angle would seem to him to indicate that his houses were all tumbling down together. Accordingly, he makes the line of his houses a horizontal line, and fails, of course, to produce the effect demanded. Here, then, is one instance out of many in which not only the understanding is allowed to overrule the eyes, but where the understanding is positively allowed to obliterate the eyes, as it were; for not only does the man believe the evidence of his understanding in opposition to that of his eyes, but (what is monstrous) the idiot is not aware that his eyes ever gave such evidence. He does not know that he has seen (and therefore quoad his consciousness has *not* seen) that which he *has* seen every day of his life.

But to return from this digression. My understanding could furnish no reason why the knocking at the gate in Macbeth should produce any effect, direct or reflected. In fact, my understanding said positively that it could *not* produce any effect. But I knew better; I felt that it did; and I waited and clung to the problem until further knowledge should enable me to solve it. At length, in 1812, Mr. Williams made his *début* on the stage of Ratcliffe Highway, and executed those unparalleled murders which have procured for him such a brilliant and undying reputation. On which murders, by the way, I must observe that in one respect they have had an ill effect, by making the connoisseur in murder very fastidious in his taste, and dissatisfied by anything that has been since done in that line. All other murders look pale by the deep crimson of his; and, as an amateur once

said to me in a querulous tone, "There has been absolutely nothing *doing* since his time, or nothing that's worth speaking of." But this is wrong; for it is unreasonable to expect all men to be great artists, and born with the genius of Mr. Williams.<sup>1</sup> Now, it will be remembered that in the first of these murders (that of the Marrs) the same incident (of a knocking at the door soon after the work of extermination was complete) did actually occur which the genius of Shakspeare has invented; and all good judges, and the most eminent dilettanti, acknowledged the felicity of Shakspeare's suggestion as soon as it was actually realized. Here, then, was a fresh proof that I was right in relying on my own feeling, in opposition to my understanding; and I again set myself to study the problem. At length I solved it to my own satisfaction; and my solution is this:—Murder, in ordinary cases, where the sympathy is wholly directed to the case of the murdered person, is an incident of coarse and vulgar horror; and for this reason,—that it flings the interest exclusively upon the natural but ignoble instinct by which we cleave to life: an instinct which, as being indispensable to the primal law of self-preservation, is the same in kind (though different in degree) amongst all living creatures. This instinct, therefore, because it annihilates all distinctions, and degrades the greatest of men to the level of "the poor beetle that we tread on," exhibits human nature in its most abject and humiliating attitude. Such an attitude would little suit the purposes of the poet. What then must he do? He must throw the interest on the murderer. Our sympathy must be with *him* (of course I mean a sympathy of comprehension, a sympathy by which we enter into his feelings, and are made to understand them,—not a sympathy of pity or approbation).<sup>2</sup> In

<sup>1</sup> A kind of presentiment of De Quincey's subsequent extravaganza called *Murder considered as one of the Fine Arts*,—in the complete form of which there is a special history of the Williams murders.—M.

<sup>2</sup> It seems almost ludicrous to guard and explain my use of a word in a situation where it would naturally explain itself. But it has become necessary to do so, in consequence of the unscholarlike use of the word sympathy, at present so general, by which, instead of taking it in its proper sense, as the act of reproducing in our minds the feelings of another, whether for hatred, indignation, love, pity, or approbation, it is made a mere synonyme of the word *pity*; and hence,

the murdered person, all strife of thought, all flux and reflux of passion and of purpose, are crushed by one overwhelming panic; the fear of instant death smites him "with its petrific mace." But in the murderer, such a murderer as a poet will condescend to, there must be raging some great storm of passion,—jealousy, ambition, vengeance, hatred,—which will create a hell within him; and into this hell we are to look.

In *Macbeth*, for the sake of gratifying his own enormous and teeming faculty of creation, Shakspeare has introduced two murderers: and, as usual in his hands, they are remarkably discriminated: but,—though in *Macbeth* the strife of mind is greater than in his wife, the tiger spirit not so awake, and his feelings caught chiefly by contagion from her,—yet, as both were finally involved in the guilt of murder, the murderous mind of necessity is finally to be presumed in both. This was to be expressed; and, on its own account, as well as to make it a more proportionable antagonist to the unoffending nature of their victim, "the gracious Duncan," and adequately to expound "the deep damnation of his taking off," this was to be expressed with peculiar energy. We were to be made to feel that the human nature,—*i.e.* the divine nature of love and mercy, spread through the hearts of all creatures, and seldom utterly withdrawn from man,—was gone, vanished, extinct, and that the fiendish nature had taken its place. And, as this effect is marvellously accomplished in the *dialogues* and *soliloquies* themselves, so it is finally consummated by the expedient under consideration; and it is to this that I now solicit the reader's attention. If the reader has ever witnessed a wife, daughter, or sister in a fainting fit, he may chance to have observed that the most affecting moment in such a spectacle is that in which a sigh and a stirring announce the recommencement of suspended life. Or, if the reader has ever been present in a vast metropolis on the day when some great national idol was carried in funeral pomp to his grave, and, chancing to walk near the course through which it passed, has felt powerfully, in the silence and desertion of the streets, and in the stagnation of ordinary business, the deep interest which at that

instead of saying "sympathy with another," many writers adopt the monstrous barbarism of "sympathy for another."

moment was possessing the heart of man,—if all at once he should hear the death-like stillness broken up by the sound of wheels rattling away from the scene, and making known that the transitory vision was dissolved, he will be aware that at no moment was his sense of the complete suspension and pause in ordinary human concerns so full and affecting as at that moment when the suspension ceases, and the goings-on of human life are suddenly resumed. All action in any direction is best expounded, measured, and made apprehensible, by reaction. Now, apply this to the case in *Macbeth*. Here, as I have said, the retiring of the human heart and the entrance of the fiendish heart was to be expressed and made sensible. Another world has stepped in; and the murderers are taken out of the region of human things, human purposes, human desires. They are transfigured: Lady Macbeth is “unsexed”; Macbeth has forgot that he was born of woman; both are conformed to the image of devils; and the world of devils is suddenly revealed. But how shall this be conveyed and made palpable? In order that a new world may step in, this world must for a time disappear. The murderers and the murder must be insulated—cut off by an immeasurable gulf from the ordinary tide and succession of human affairs—locked up and sequestered in some deep recess; we must be made sensible that the world of ordinary life is suddenly arrested, laid asleep, tranced, racked into a dread armistice; time must be annihilated, relation to things without abolished; and all must pass self-withdrawn into a deep syncope and suspension of earthly passion. Hence it is that, when the deed is done, when the work of darkness is perfect, then the world of darkness passes away like a pageantry in the clouds: the knocking at the gate is heard, and it makes known audibly that the reaction has commenced; the human has made its reflux upon the fiendish; the pulses of life are beginning to beat again; and the re-establishment of the goings-on of the world in which we live first makes us profoundly sensible of the awful parenthesis that had suspended them.

O mighty poet! Thy works are not as those of other men, simply and merely great works of art, but are also like the phenomena of nature, like the sun and the sea, the



stars and the flowers, like frost and snow, rain and dew, hail-storm and thunder, which are to be studied with entire submission of our own faculties, and in the perfect faith that in them there can be no too much or too little, nothing useless or inert, but that, the farther we press in our discoveries, the more we shall see proofs of design and self-supporting arrangement where the careless eye had seen nothing but accident!

## EARLY MEMORIALS OF GRASMERE<sup>1</sup>

SOON after my return to Oxford in 1807-8,<sup>2</sup> I received a letter from Miss Wordsworth, asking for any subscriptions I might succeed in obtaining amongst my college friends in

<sup>1</sup> Appeared originally, with the title *Recollections of Grasmere*, in *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* for September 1839, as one of the series of articles which De Quincey had begun to contribute to that periodical in 1834 under the title of "Sketches of Life and Manners from the Autobiography of an English Opium-Eater," with the alternative title of "Lake Reminiscences from 1807 to 1830" for a portion of them. When De Quincey reprinted the paper in 1854, in vol. ii of the Collective Edition of his Writings, it was under its new title of *Early Memorials of Grasmere*, but still as one of the series of his Autobiographic Sketches—with its place in that series altered, however, so as to make it the first of his papers of "Lake Reminiscences," preceding and introducing those on Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Southey. This arrangement was retained in Messrs. Black's sixteen-volume reissue of the Collective Writings. But, though thus originally interjected into the series of De Quincey's Autobiographic Sketches, the paper is really independent, and quite different in kind from the rest of that series. Accordingly, it is best presented by itself as a specimen of De Quincey's descriptive and narrative art in commemorating a tragic incident of real English life which happened in the Lake District about the time of his own first acquaintance with that district. The words "Early Memorials of Grasmere," as the reader soon finds, do not mean "Memoirs of Grasmere in Early Times," or "Antiquities of Grasmere," or anything of that kind. It is to De Quincey himself, as associated with Grasmere, that the word "Early" has reference; and *A Tale of Grasmere when I first knew it* would be a more exact title.—On comparing De Quincey's reprint of 1854 with the original in *Tait's Magazine* for September 1839, I have found that he bestowed great pains on the revision, and made considerable changes. These, I think, were all improvements.—M.

<sup>2</sup> After one week of what he calls "delightful intercourse" with the poet and the poet's admirable sister Dorothy Wordsworth, he had

aid of the funds then raising on behalf of an orphan family, who had become such by an affecting tragedy that had occurred within a few weeks from my visit to Grasmere.

Miss Wordsworth's simple but fervid memoir not being within my reach at this moment,<sup>1</sup> I must trust to my own recollections and my own impressions to retrace the story; which, after all, is not much of a story to excite or to impress, unless for those who can find a sufficient interest in the trials and calamities of hard-working peasants, and can reverence the fortitude which, being lodged in so frail a tenement as the person of a little girl, not much, if anything, above nine years old, could face an occasion of sudden mysterious abandonment, and could tower up, during one night, into the perfect energies of womanhood, under the mere pressure of difficulty, and under the sense of new-born responsibilities awfully bequeathed to her, and in the most lonely, perhaps, of English habitations.

The little valley of Easedale,—which, and the neighbourhood of which, were the scenes of these interesting events,—is on its own account one of the most impressive solitudes amongst the mountains of the Lake district; and I must pause to describe it. Easedale is impressive *as* a solitude; for the depth of the seclusion is brought out and forced more pointedly upon the feelings by the thin scattering of houses over its sides, and over the surface of what may be called its floor. These are not above six at the most; and one, the remotest of the whole, was untenanted for all the thirty years of my acquaintance with the place. *Secondly*, it is impressive from the excessive loveliness which adorns its little area. This is broken up into small fields and miniature meadows, separated, not—as too often happens, with sad injury to the beauty of the Lake country—by stone walls,

left Grasmere “about the 12th of November 1807,” to return to Oxford, where he had been a student in Worcester College since 1803. He was then twenty-two years of age.—M.

<sup>1</sup> From some sentences of the original paper of 1839, omitted in the reprint, it appears that the “memoir” here spoken of was one which Dorothy Wordsworth had drawn up by way of a circular appeal to charitable persons, but with a special view of its coming into the hands of Queen Charlotte and the other ladies of the royal family.—M.

but sometimes by little hedgerows, sometimes by little sparkling, pebbly "becks," lustrous to the very bottom, and not too broad for a child's flying leap, and sometimes by wild self-sown woodlands of birch, alder, holly, mountain ash, and hazel, that meander through the valley, intervening the different estates with natural sylvan marches, and giving cheerfulness in winter by the bright scarlet of their berries. It is the character of all the northern English valleys, as I have already remarked,—and it is a character first noticed by Wordsworth—that they assume, in their bottom areas, the level, floor-like shape, making everywhere a direct angle with the surrounding hills, and definitely marking out the margin of their outlines; whereas the Welsh valleys have too often the glaring imperfection of the basin shape, which allows no sense of any flat area or valley surface: the hills are already commencing at the very centre of what is called the level area. The little valley of Easedale is, in this respect, as highly finished as in every other; and in the Westmorland spring, which may be considered May and the earlier half of June, whilst the grass in the meadows is yet short from the habit of keeping the sheep on it until a much later period than elsewhere (*viz.* until the mountains are so far cleared of snow and the probability of storms as to make it safe to send them out on their summer migration), it follows naturally that the little fields in Easedale have the most lawny appearance, and, from the humidity of the Westmorland<sup>1</sup> climate, the most verdant that it is possible to imagine. But there is a third advantage possessed by this Easedale, above other rival valleys, in the sublimity of its mountain barriers. In one of its many rocky recesses is seen a "force" (such is the local name for a cataract), white with foam, descending at all seasons with considerable strength, and, after the melting of snows, with an Alpine violence. Follow the leading of this "force" for three

<sup>1</sup> It is pretty generally known, perhaps, that Westmorland and Devonshire are the two rainiest counties in England. At Kirby Lonsdale, lying just on the outer margin of the Lake district, one-fifth more rain is computed to fall than in the adjacent counties on the same western side of England. But it is also notorious that the western side of the island universally is more rainy than the east. Collins called it the showery west.

quarters of a mile, and you come to a little mountain lake, locally termed a "tarn,"<sup>1</sup> the very finest and most gloomily sublime of its class. From this tarn it was, I doubt not, though applying it to another, that Wordsworth drew the circumstances of his general description. And far beyond this "enormous barrier," that thus imprisons the very winds, tower upwards the aspiring heads (usually enveloped in cloud and mist) of Glaramara, Bow Fell, and the other fells of Langdale Head and Borrowdale. Easedale, in its relation to Grasmere, is a chamber within a chamber, or rather a closet within a chamber—a chapel within a cathedral—a little private oratory within a chapel. The sole approach, as I have mentioned, is from Grasmere; and some *one* outlet there must inevitably be in every vale that can be interesting to a human occupant, since without water it would not be habitable, and running water must force an egress for itself, and, consequently, an ingress for the reader and myself. But, properly speaking, there is no other. For, when you explore the remoter end of the vale, at which you suspect some communication with the world outside, you find before you a most formidable amount of climbing, the extent of which can hardly be measured where there is no solitary object of human workmanship or vestige of animal life,—not a sheep-track, not a shepherd's hovel, but rock and heath, heath and rock, tossed about in monotonous confusion. And, after the ascent is mastered, you descend into a second vale—long, narrow, sterile—known by the name of "Far Easedale": from which point, if you could drive a tunnel *under* the everlasting hills, perhaps six or seven miles might bring you to the nearest habitation of man, in Borrowdale; but, going *over* the mountains, the road cannot be less than twelve or fourteen, and, in point of fatigue, at the least twenty. This long valley, which is really terrific at noonday, from its utter

<sup>1</sup> A *tarn* is a lake, generally (perhaps always) a small one, and always, as I think (but this I have heard disputed), lying above the level of the inhabited valleys and the large lakes; and subject to this farther restriction, first noticed by Wordsworth, that it has no main feeder. Now, this latter accident of the *thing* at once explains and authenticates my account of the *word*, viz. that it is the Danish word *taaren* (a *trickling of tears*), a deposit of waters from the weeping of rain down the smooth faces of the rocks.

loneliness and desolation, completes the defences of little sylvan Easedale. There is one door into it from the Grasmere side ; but that door is obscure ; and on every other quarter there is no door at all ; not any, the roughest, access, but such as would demand a day's walking.

Such is the solitude—so deep and so rich in miniature beauty—of Easedale ; and in this solitude it was that George and Sarah Green, two poor and hard-working peasants, dwelt, with a numerous family of small children. Poor as they were, they had won the general respect of the neighbourhood, from the uncomplaining firmness with which they bore the hardships of their lot, and from the decent attire in which the good mother of the family contrived to send out her children to the Grasmere parish-school. It is a custom, and a very ancient one, in Westmorland—the same custom (resting on the same causes) I have witnessed also in southern Scotland—that any sale by auction of household furniture (and seldom a month passes without something of the sort) forms an excuse for the good women, throughout the whole circumference of perhaps four or five valleys, to assemble at the place of sale, with the nominal purpose of buying something they may happen to want. A sale, except it were of the sort exclusively interesting to farming *men*, is a kind of general intimation to the country, from the owner of the property, that he will, on that afternoon, be “at home” to all comers, and hopes to see as large an attendance as possible. Accordingly, it was the almost invariable custom—and often, too, when the parties were far too poor for such an effort of hospitality—to make ample provision, not of eatables, but of liquor, for all who came. Even a gentleman who should happen to present himself on such a festal occasion, by way of seeing the “humours” of the scene, was certain of meeting the most cordial welcome. The good woman of the house more particularly testified her sense of the honour done to her, and was sure to seek out some cherished and solitary article of china—a wreck from a century back—in order that he, being a porcelain man among so many delf men and women, might have a porcelain cup to drink from.

The main secret of attraction at these sales—many of which I have attended—was the social rendezvous thus

effected between parties so remote from each other (either by real distance or by virtual distance resulting from the separation effected by mountains 3000 feet high) that, in fact, without some such common object, they would not be likely to hear of each other for months, or actually to meet for years. This principal charm of the "gathering," seasoned, doubtless, to many by the certain anticipation that the whole budget of rural gossip would then and there be opened, was not assuredly diminished to the men by the anticipation of excellent ale (usually brewed six or seven weeks before, in preparation for the event), and possibly of still more excellent *powsowdy* (a combination of ale, spirits, and spices); nor to the women by some prospect, not so inevitably fulfilled, but pretty certain in a liberal house, of communicating their news over excellent tea. Even the auctioneer was always a character in the drama: he was always a rustic old humourist, and a jovial drunkard, privileged in certain good-humoured liberties and jokes with all bidders, gentle or simple, and furnished with an ancient inheritance of jests appropriate to the articles offered for sale, — jests that had, doubtless, done their office from Elizabeth's golden days, but no more, on that account, failing of their expected effect, with either man or woman of this nineteenth century, than the sun fails to gladden the heart because it is that same old superannuated sun that has gladdened it for thousands of years.

One thing, however, in mere justice to the Dalesmen of Westmorland and Cumberland, I am bound in this place to record. Often as I have been at these sales, and years before even a scattering of gentry began to attend, yet so true to the natural standard of politeness was the decorum uniformly maintained that even the old buffoon of an auctioneer never forgot himself so far as to found upon any article of furniture a jest fitted to call up a painful blush in any woman's face. He might, perhaps, go so far as to awaken a little rosy confusion upon some young bride's countenance, when pressing a eradle upon her attention; but never did I hear him utter, nor would he have been tolerated in uttering, a scurrilous or disgusting jest, such as might easily have been suggested by something offered at a house-

hold sale. Such jests as these I heard for the first time at a sale in Grasmere in 1814; and, I am ashamed to say it, from some "gentlemen" of a great city. And it grieved me to see the effect, as it expressed itself upon the manly faces of the grave Dalesmen—a sense of insult offered to their women, who met in confiding reliance upon the forbearance of the men, and upon their regard for the dignity of the female sex; this feeling struggling with the habitual respect they are inclined to show towards what they suppose gentle blood and superior education. Taken generally, however, these were the most picturesque and festal meetings which the manners of the country produced. There you saw all ages and both sexes assembled; there you saw old men whose heads would have been studies for Guido; there you saw the most colossal and stately figures amongst the young men that England has to show; there the most beautiful young women. There it was that the social benevolence, the innocent mirth, and the neighbourly kindness of the people, most delightfully expanded, and expressed themselves with the least reserve.

To such a scene it was,—to a sale of domestic furniture at the house of some proprietor in Langdale,—that George and Sarah Green set forward in the forenoon of a day fated to be their last on earth. The sale was to take place in Langdalehead; to which, from their own cottage in Ease-dale, it was possible in daylight, and supposing no mist upon the hills, to find out a short cut of not more than five or six miles. By this route they went; and, notwithstanding the snow lay on the ground, they reached their destination in safety. The attendance at the sale must have been diminished by the rigorous state of the weather; but still the scene was a gay one as usual. Sarah Green, though a good and worthy woman in her maturer years, had been imprudent, and—as the merciful judgment of the country is apt to express it—"unfortunate" in her youth. She had an elder daughter, who was illegitimate; and I believe the father of this girl was dead. The girl herself was grown up; and the peculiar solicitude of poor Sarah's maternal heart was at this time called forth on *her* behalf: she wished to see her placed in a very respectable house, where the mistress



was distinguished for her notable qualities, and for success in forming good servants. This object,—as important to Sarah Green in the narrow range of her cares as, in a more exalted family, it might be to obtain a ship for a lieutenant that had passed as master and commander, or to get him “posted,”—occupied her almost throughout the sale. A doubtful answer had been given to her application; and Sarah was going about the crowd, and weaving her person in and out, in order to lay hold of this or that intercessor who might have, or might seem to have, some weight with the principal person concerned.

This I think it interesting to notice, as the last occupation which is known to have stirred the pulses of her heart. An illegitimate child is everywhere, even in the indulgent society of Westmorland Dalesmen, under some cloud of discountenance<sup>1</sup>; so that Sarah Green might consider her duty to be the stronger towards this child of her “misfortune.” And she probably had another reason for her anxiety—as some words dropped by her on this evening led people to presume—in her conscientious desire to introduce her daughter into a situation less perilous than that which had compassed her own youthful steps with snares. If so, it is painful to know that the virtuous wish, whose

“Vital warmth  
Gave the last human motion to her heart,”

should not have been fulfilled. She was a woman of ardent and affectionate spirit; of which Miss Wordsworth gave me some circumstantial and affecting instances. This ardour it was, and her impassioned manner, that drew attention to what she did; for, otherwise, she was too poor a person to be important in the estimation of strangers, and, of all possible situations, to be important at a sale, where the public attention was naturally fixed upon the chief pur-

<sup>1</sup> But still nothing at all in England by comparison with its gloomy excess in Scotland. In the present generation the rancorous bigotry of this feeling has been considerably mitigated. But, if the reader wishes to view it in its ancient strength, I advise him to look into the “Life of Alexander Alexander” (2 vols. 1830). He was a poor outcast, whose latter days were sheltered from ruin by the munificence of the late Mr. Blackwood, senior,

chasers, and the attention of the purchasers fixed upon the chief competitors. Hence it happened that, after she ceased to challenge notice by the emphasis of her solicitations for her daughter, she ceased to be noticed at all; and nothing was recollected of her subsequent behaviour until the time arrived for general separation. This time was considerably after sunset; and the final recollections of the crowd with respect to George and Sarah Green were that, upon their intention being understood to retrace their morning path, and to attempt the perilous task of dropping down into Easedale from the mountains above Langdalehead, a sound of remonstrance arose from many quarters. However, at such a moment, when everybody was in the hurry of departure, and to such persons (persons, I mean, so mature in years and in local knowledge), the opposition could not be very obstinate: party after party rode off; the meeting melted away, or, as the northern phrase is, *scaled*<sup>1</sup>; and at length nobody was left of any weight that could pretend to influence the decision of elderly people. They quitted the scene, professing to obey some advice or other upon the choice of roads; but, at as early a point as they could do so unobserved, began to ascend the hills everywhere open from the rude carriage-way. After this they were seen no more. They had disappeared into the cloud of death. Voices were heard, some hours afterwards, from the mountains—voices, as some thought, of alarm: others said, No,—that it was only the voices of jovial people, carried by the wind into uncertain regions. The result was that no attention was paid to the sounds.

<sup>1</sup> "*Scaled*":—*Scale* is a verb both active and neuter. I use it here as a neuter verb, in the sense (a Cumberland sense) of separating to all the points of the compass. But by Shakspeare it is used in an active or transitive sense. Speaking of some secret news, he says, "We'll seale it a little more"—*i.e.* spread it in all directions, and disentangle its complexities. [Not quite correct. The passage is in *Coriolanus* I. 1, where Menenius Agrippa, when about to tell the eitizens the story of the rebellion of the Belly against the other members of the body, says they may have heard it already, but he will *scale't a little more*. Another reading of the phrase, however, is *s'ale't*; and the Cambridge editors adopt this reading.—*Scale* in the sense of *disperse* is one of the commonest of Scottish words: *e.g.* "*the kirk was scalin'*" for "the service was over and the congregation was dispersing itself."—M.]

That night, in little peaceful Easedale, six children sat by a peat fire, expecting the return of their parents, upon whom they depended for their daily bread. Let a day pass, and they were starving. Every sound was heard with anxiety; for all this was reported many hundred times to Miss Wordsworth, and to those who, like myself, were never wearied of hearing the details. Every sound, every echo amongst the hills, was listened to for five hours, from seven to twelve. At length the eldest girl of the family—about nine years old—told her little brothers and sisters to go to bed. They had been trained to obedience; and all of them, at the voice of their eldest sister, went off fearfully to their beds. What could be *their* fears it is difficult to say; they had no knowledge to instruct them in the dangers of the hills; but the eldest sister always averred that they had as deep a solicitude as she herself had about their parents. Doubtless she had communicated her fears to *them*. Some time in the course of the evening—but it was late, and after midnight—the moon arose, and shed a torrent of light upon the Langdale fells, which had already, long hours before, witnessed in darkness the death of their parents.

That night, and the following morning, came a further and a heavier fall of snow; in consequence of which the poor children were completely imprisoned, and cut off from all possibility of communicating with their next neighbours. The brook was too much for them to leap; and the little, crazy wooden bridge could not be crossed, or even approached with safety, from the drifting of the snow having made it impossible to ascertain the exact situation of some treacherous hole in its timbers, which, if trod upon, would have let a small child drop through into the rapid waters. Their parents did not return. For some hours of the morning the children clung to the hope that the extreme severity of the night had tempted them to sleep in Langdale; but this hope forsook them as the day wore away. Their father, George Green, had served as a soldier, and was an active man, of ready resources, who would not, under any circumstances, have failed to force a road back to his family, had he been still living; and this reflection, or rather semi-conscious feeling, which the awfulness of their situation forced upon the

minds of all but the mere infants, awakened them to the whole extent of their calamity. Wonderful it is to see the effect of sudden misery, sudden grief, or sudden fear, in sharpening (where they do not utterly upset) the intellectual perceptions. Instances must have fallen in the way of most of us. And I have noticed frequently that even sudden and intense bodily pain forms part of the machinery employed by nature for quickening the development of the mind. The perceptions of infants are not, in fact, excited by graduated steps and continuously, but *per saltum*, and by unequal starts. At least, within the whole range of my own experience, I have remarked that, after any very severe fit of those peculiar pains to which the delicate digestive organs of most infants are liable, there always became apparent on the following day a very considerable increase of vital energy and of quickened attention to the objects around them. The poor desolate children of Blentarn Ghyll,<sup>1</sup> hourly becoming more pathetically convinced that they were orphans, gave many evidences of this awaking power as lodged, by a providential arrangement, in situations of trial that most require it. They huddled together, in the evening, round their hearth-fire of peats, and held their little family councils upon what was to be done towards any chance—if chance remained—of yet giving aid to their parents; for a slender hope had sprung up that some hovel or sheepfold might have furnished them a screen (or, in Westmorland phrase, a *biel*<sup>2</sup>) against the

<sup>1</sup> Wordsworth's conjecture as to the origin of the name is probably the true one. There is, at a little elevation above the place, a small concave tract of ground, shaped like the bed of a tarn. Some causes having diverted the supplies of water, at some remote period, from the little reservoir, the tarn has probably disappeared; but, the bed, and other indications of a tarn (particularly a little ghyll, or steep rocky cleft for discharging the water), having remained as memorials that it once existed, the country people have called it the Blind Tarn—the tarn which wants its eye, in wanting the luminous sparkle of the waters of right belonging to it.

<sup>2</sup> Another instance of a word common to the vocabulary of the English Lake district and that of Scotland. *Biel* in Scotch means "a shelter," and is a word of fine and tender associations in that sense. "*Better a wee buss than nae biel*" ("Better a small bush than no shelter at all") is an old Scottish proverb, of which Burns was particularly fond.—M.

weather quarter of the storm, in which hovel they might even now be lying snowed up ; and, secondly, as regarded themselves, in what way they were to make known their situation, in case the snow should continue or should increase ; for starvation stared them in the face if they should be confined for many days to their house.

Meantime, the eldest sister, little Agnes, though sadly alarmed, and feeling the sensation of *eeriness* as twilight came on and she looked out from the cottage-door to the dreadful fells on which, too probably, her parents were lying corpses (and possibly not many hundred yards from their own threshold), yet exerted herself to take all the measures which their own prospects made prudent. And she told Miss Wordsworth that, in the midst of the oppression on her little spirit from vague ghostly terrors, she did not fail, however, to draw some comfort from the consideration that the very same causes which produced their danger in one direction sheltered them from danger of another kind,—such dangers as she knew, from books that she had read, would have threatened a little desolate flock of children in other parts of England ; for she considered thankfully that, if *they* could not get out into Grasmere, on the other hand bad men, and wild seafaring foreigners, who sometimes passed along the high road even in that vale, could not get to *them* ; and that, as to their neighbours, so far from having anything to fear in that quarter, their greatest apprehension was lest they might not be able to acquaint them with their situation ; but that, if this could be accomplished, the very sternest amongst them were kind-hearted people, that would contend with each other for the privilege of assisting them. Somewhat cheered with these thoughts, and having caused all her brothers and sisters—except the two little things, not yet of a fit age—to kneel down and say the prayers which they had been taught, this admirable little maiden turned herself to every household task that could have proved useful to them in a long captivity. First of all, upon some recollection that the clock was nearly going down, she wound it up. Next, she took all the milk which remained from what her mother had provided for the children's consumption during her absence and for the breakfast of the following morning, — this luckily

was still in sufficient plenty for two days' consumption (skimmed or "blue" milk being only one halfpenny a quart, and the quart a most redundant one, in Grasmere),—this she took and scalded, so as to save it from turning sour. That done, she next examined the meal chest; made the common oatmeal porridge of the country (the "burgoo" of the Royal Navy); but put all of the children, except the two youngest, on short allowance; and, by way of reconciling them in some measure to this stinted meal, she found out a little hoard of flour, part of which she baked for them upon the hearth into little cakes; and this unusual delicacy persuaded them to think that they had been celebrating a feast. Next, before night coming on should make it too trying to her own feelings, or before fresh snow coming on might make it impossible, she issued out of doors. There her first task was, with the assistance of two younger brothers, to carry in from the peat-stack as many peats as might serve them for a week's consumption. That done, in the second place she examined the potatoes, buried in "brackens" (that is, withered fern): these were not many; and she thought it better to leave them where they were, excepting as many as would make a single meal, under a fear that the heat of their cottage would spoil them if removed.

Having thus made all the provision in her power for supporting their own lives, she turned her attention to the cow. Her she milked; but, unfortunately, the milk she gave, either from being badly fed, or from some other cause, was too trifling to be of much consideration towards the wants of a large family. Here, however, her chief anxiety was to get down the hay for the cow's food from a loft above the out-house; and in this she succeeded but imperfectly, from want of strength and size to cope with the difficulties of the case,—besides that the increasing darkness by this time, together with the gloom of the place, made it a matter of great self-conquest for her to work at all; but, as respected one night at any rate, she placed the cow in a situation of luxurious warmth and comfort. Then, retreating into the warm house, and "barring" the door, she sat down to undress the two youngest of the children; them she laid carefully and cosily in their little nests upstairs, and sang them to sleep. The rest she

kept up to bear her company until the clock should tell them it was midnight; up to which time she had still a lingering hope that some welcome shout from the hills above, which they were all to strain their ears to catch, might yet assure them that they were not wholly orphans, even though one parent should have perished. No shout, it may be supposed, was ever heard; nor could a shout, in any case, have been heard, for the night was one of tumultuous wind. And, though, amidst its ravings, sometimes they fancied a sound of voices, still, in the dead lulls that now and then succeeded, they heard nothing to confirm their hopes. As last services to what she might now have called her own little family, Agnes took precautions against the drifting of the snow *within* the door and *within* the imperfect window, which had caused them some discomfort on the preceding day; and, finally, she adopted the most systematic and elaborate plans for preventing the possibility of their fire being extinguished,—which, in the event of their being thrown upon the ultimate resource of their potatoes, would be absolutely indispensable to their existence, and in any case a main element of their comfort.

The night slipped away, and morning came, bringing with it no better hopes of any kind. Change there had been none but for the worse. The snow had greatly increased in quantity; and the drifts seemed far more formidable. A second day passed like the first,—little Agnes still keeping her young flock quiet, and tolerably comfortable, and still calling on all the elders in succession to say their prayers, morning and night.

A third day came; and, whether on that or on the fourth I do not now recollect, but on one or other, there came a welcome gleam of hope. The arrangement of the snow-drifts had shifted during the night; and, though the wooden bridge was still impracticable, a low wall had been exposed, over which, by a circuit which evaded the brook, it seemed possible that a road might be found into Grasmere. In some walls it was necessary to force gaps; but this was effected without much difficulty, even by children; for the Westmorland field walls are “open,”—that is, uncemented with mortar; and the push of a stick will generally detach so

much from the upper part of any old crazy fence as to lower it sufficiently for female, or even for childish, steps to pass. The little boys accompanied their sister until she came to the other side of the hill ; which, lying more sheltered from the weather, offered a path onwards comparatively easy. Here they parted ; and little Agnes pursued her solitary mission to the nearest house she could find accessible in Grasmere.

No house could have proved a wrong one in such a case. Miss Wordsworth and I often heard the description renewed of the horror which, in an instant, displaced the smile of hospitable greeting, when little weeping Agnes told her sad tale. No tongue can express the fervid sympathy which travelled through the vale, like fire in an American forest, when it was learned that neither George nor Sarah Green had been seen by their children since the day of the Langdale sale. Within half an hour, or little more, from the remotest parts of the valley—some of them distant nearly two miles from the point of rendezvous—all the men of Grasmere had assembled at the little cluster of cottages called "Kirktown," from its adjacency to the venerable parish-church of St. Oswald. There were at the time I settled in Grasmere—viz. in the spring of 1809, and, therefore, I suppose, in 1807-8, fifteen months previously—about sixty-three households in the vale ; and the total number of souls was about 265 to 270 ; so that the number of fighting men would be about sixty or sixty-six, according to the common way of computing the proportion ; and the majority were athletic and powerfully built. Sixty, at least, after a short consultation as to the plan of operations, and for arranging the kind of signals by which they were to communicate from great distances, and in the perilous events of mists or snow-storms, set off with the speed of Alpine hunters to the hills. The dangers of the undertaking were considerable, under the uneasy and agitated state of the weather ; and all the women of the vale were in the greatest anxiety until night brought them back, in a body, unsuccessful. Three days at the least, and I rather think five, the search was ineffectual : which arose partly from the great extent of the ground to be examined, and partly from the natural mistake made of ranging almost exclusively during the earlier days on that part



of the hills over which the path of Easedale might be presumed to have been selected under any reasonable latitude of circuitousness. But the fact is, when the fatal accident (for such it has often proved) of a permanent mist surprises a man on the hills, if he turns and loses his direction, he is a lost man ; and, without doing this so as to lose the power of *s'orienter*<sup>1</sup> all at once, it is yet well known how difficult it is to avoid losing it insensibly and by degrees. Baffling snow-showers are the worst kind of mists. And the poor Greens had, under that kind of confusion, wandered many a mile out of their proper track ; so that to search for them upon any line indicated by the ordinary probabilities would perhaps offer the slenderest chance for finding them.

The zeal of the people, meantime, was not in the least abated, but rather quickened, by the wearisome disappointments ; every hour of daylight was turned to account ; no man of the valley ever came home to meals ; and the reply of a young shoemaker, on the fourth night's return, speaks sufficiently for the unabated spirit of the vale. Miss Wordsworth asked what he would do on the next morning. "Go up again, of course," was his answer. But what if to-morrow also should turn out like all the rest ? "Why, go up in stronger force on the day after." Yet this man was sacrificing his own daily earnings, without a chance of recompense. At length sagacious dogs were taken up ; and, about noonday, a shout from an aerial height, amongst thick volumes of cloudy vapour, propagated through repeating bands of men from a distance of many miles, conveyed as by telegraph into Grasmere the news that the bodies were found. George Green was lying at the bottom of a precipice from which he had fallen. Sarah Green was found on the summit of the precipice ; and, by laying together all the indications of what had passed, and reading into coherency the sad hieroglyphics of their last agonies, it was conjectured that the husband had desired his wife to pause for a few minutes, wrapping her, meantime, in his own greatcoat, whilst he

<sup>1</sup> *S'orienter*, i.e. originally setting oneself by the east as one of the cardinal points of the compass ; hence "steering one's course properly," "discovering where one is," or even "knowing what one is about."—M.

should go forward and reconnoitre the ground, in order to catch a sight of some object (rocky peak, or tarn, or peat-field) which might ascertain their real situation. Either the snow above, already lying in drifts, or the blinding snow-storms driving into his eyes, must have misled him as to the nature of the circumjacent ground; for the precipice over which he had fallen was but a few yards from the spot in which he had quitted his wife. The depth of the descent and the fury of the wind (almost always violent on these cloudy altitudes) would prevent any distinct communication between the dying husband below and his despairing wife above; but it was believed by the shepherds best acquainted with the ground, and the range of sound as regarded the capacities of the human ear under the probable circumstances of the storm, that Sarah might have caught, at intervals, the groans of her unhappy partner, supposing that his death were at all a lingering one. Others, on the contrary, supposed her to have gathered this catastrophe rather from the *want* of any sounds, and from his continued absence, than from any one distinct or positive expression of it; both because the smooth and unruffled surface of the snow where he lay seemed to argue that he had died without a struggle, perhaps without a groan, and because that tremendous sound of "hurting" in the upper chambers of the air which often accompanies a snow-storm, when combined with heavy gales of wind, would utterly suppress and stifle (as they conceived) any sounds so feeble as those from a dying man. In any case, and by whatever sad language of sounds or signs, positive or negative, she might have learned or guessed her loss, it was generally agreed that the wild shrieks heard towards midnight in Langdalehead<sup>1</sup> announced

<sup>1</sup> I once heard, also, in talking with a Langdale family upon this tragic tale, that the sounds had penetrated into the valley of Little Langdale; which is possible enough. For, although this interesting recess of the entire Langdale basin (which bears somewhat of the same relation to the Great Langdale that Easedale bears to Grasmere) does, in fact, lie beyond Langdalehead by the entire breadth of that dale, yet, from the singular accident of having its area raised far above the level of the adjacent vales, one most solitary section of Little Langdale (in which lies a tiny lake, and on the banks of that lake dwells one solitary family), being exactly at right angles both to

the agonizing moment which brought to her now widowed heart the conviction of utter desolation and of final abandonment to her own solitary and fast-fleeting energies. It seemed probable that the *sudden* disappearance of her husband from her pursuing eyes would teach her to understand his fate, and that the consequent indefinite apprehension of instant death lying all around the point on which she sat had kept her stationary to the very attitude in which her husband left her, until her failing powers, and the increasing bitterness of the cold to one no longer in motion, would soon make those changes of place impossible which too awfully had made themselves known as dangerous. The footsteps in some places, wherever drifting had not obliterated them, yet traceable as to the outline, though partially filled up with later falls of snow, satisfactorily showed that, however much they might have rambled, after crossing and doubling upon their own tracks, and many a mile astray from their right path, they must have kept together to the very plateau or shelf of rock at which (*i.e. on* which, and *below* which) their wanderings had terminated; for there were evidently no steps from this plateau in the retrograde order.

By the time they had reached this final stage of their erroneous course, all possibility of escape must have been long over for both alike; because their exhaustion must have been excessive before they could have reached a point so remote and high; and, unfortunately, the direct result of all this exhaustion had been to throw them farther off their home, or from "*any* dwelling-place of man," than they were at starting. Here, therefore, at this rocky pinnacle, hope was extinct for the wedded couple, but not perhaps for the husband. It was the impression of the vale that perhaps, within half-an-hour before reaching this fatal point, George Green might, had his conscience or his heart allowed him in so base a desertion, have saved himself singly, without any very great difficulty. It is to be hoped, however—and, for my part, I think too well of human nature to hesitate in believing—that not many, even amongst the meaner-minded

Langdalehead and to the other complementary section of the Lesser Langdale, is brought into a position and an elevation virtually much nearer to objects (especially to audible objects) on the Easedale Fells.

and the least generous of men, could have reconciled themselves to the abandonment of a poor fainting female companion in such circumstances. Still, though not more than a most imperative duty, it was such a duty as most of his associates believed to have cost him (perhaps consciously) his life. It is an impressive truth that sometimes in the very lowest forms of duty, less than which would rank a man as a villain, there is, nevertheless, the sublimest ascent of self-sacrifice. To do *less* would class you as an object of eternal scorn: to do so much presumes the grandeur of heroism. For his wife not only must have disabled him greatly by clinging to his arm for support; but it was known, from her peculiar character and manner, that she would be likely to rob him of his coolness and presence of mind, by too painfully fixing his thoughts, where her own would be busiest, upon their helpless little family. “*Stung* with the thoughts of home”—to borrow the fine expression of Thomson in describing a similar case<sup>1</sup>—alternately thinking of the blessedness of that warm fireside at Blentarn Ghyll which was not again to spread its genial glow through her freezing limbs, and of those darling little faces which, in this world, she was to see no more; unintentionally, and without being aware even of that result, she would rob the brave man (for such he was) of his fortitude, and the strong man of his *animal* resources. And yet (such, in the very opposite direction, was equally the impression universally through Grasmere), had Sarah Green foreseen, could her affectionate heart have guessed, even the tenth part of that love and neighbourly respect for herself which soon afterwards expressed themselves in showers of bounty to her children; could she have

<sup>1</sup> In his *Winter*, where there is a description of a cottager lost in a snow-storm:—

“The swain  
Disastered stands; sees other hills ascend,  
Of unknown, joyless brow; and other scenes,  
Of horrid prospect, shag the trackless plain;  
Nor finds the river, nor the forest, hid  
Beneath the formless wild; but wanders on  
From hill to dale, still more and more astray,  
Impatient flouncing through the drifted heaps,  
Stung with the thoughts of home.”—M.

looked behind the curtain of destiny sufficiently to learn that the very desolation of these poor children which wrung her maternal heart, and doubtless constituted to her the sting of death, would prove the signal and the pledge of such anxious guardianship as not many rich men's children receive, and that this overflowing offering to her own memory would not be a hasty or decaying tribute of the first sorrowing sensibilities, but would pursue her children steadily until their hopeful settlement in life : anything approaching this, known or guessed, would have caused her (so said all who knew her) to welcome the bitter end by which such privileges were to be purchased, and solemnly to breathe out into the ear of that holy angel who gathers the whispers of dying mothers torn asunder from their infants a thankful *Nunc dimittis* (Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace), as the farewell ejaculation rightfully belonging to the occasion.

The funeral of the ill-fated Greens was, it may be supposed, attended by all the Vale : it took place about eight days after they were found ; and the day happened to be in the most perfect contrast to the sort of weather which prevailed at the time of their misfortune. Some snow still remained here and there upon the ground ; but the azure of the sky was unstained by a cloud ; and a golden sunlight seemed to sleep, so balmy and tranquil was the season, upon the very hills where the pair had wandered,—then a howling wilderness, but now a green pastoral lawn in its lower ranges, and a glittering expanse of virgin snow in its higher. George Green had, I believe, an elder family by a former wife ; and it was for some of these children, who lived at a distance, and who wished to give their attendance at the grave, that the funeral was delayed. At this point, because really suggested by the contrast of the funeral tranquillity with the howling tempest of the fatal night, it may be proper to remind the reader of Wordsworth's memorial stanzas :—

“ Who weeps for strangers ? Many wept  
For George and Sarah Green ;  
Wept for that pair's unhappy fate  
Whose graves may here be seen.

“ By night upon these stormy fells  
 Did wife and husband roam ;  
 Six little ones at home had left,  
 And could not find that home.

“ For *any* dwelling-place of man  
 As vainly did they seek :  
*He* perished ; and a voice was heard—  
 The widow's lonely shriek.

“ Not many steps, and she was left  
 A body without life—  
 A few short steps were the chain that bound  
 The husband to the wife.

“ *Now* do these sternly-featured hills  
 Look gently on this grave ;  
 And quiet *now* are the depths of air,  
 As a sea without a wave.

“ But deeper lies the heart of peace,  
 In quiet more profound ;  
 The heart of quietness is here  
 Within this churchyard bound.

“ And from all agony of mind  
 It keeps them safe, and far  
 From fear and grief, and from all need  
 Of sun or guiding star.

“ O darkness of the grave ! how deep,  
 After that living night—  
 That last and dreary living one  
 Of sorrow and affright !

“ O sacred marriage-bed of death !  
 That keeps them side by side  
 In bond of peace, in bond of love,  
 That may not be untied ! ”

After this solemn ceremony of the funeral was over—at which, by the way, I heard Miss Wordsworth declare that the grief of Sarah's illegitimate daughter was the most overwhelming she had ever witnessed—a regular distribution of the children was made amongst the wealthier families of the Vale. There had already, and before the funeral, been a perfect struggle to obtain one of the children amongst all who had any facilities for discharging the duties of such a trust ; and even the poorest had put in their claim to bear

some part in the expenses of the case. But it was judiciously decided that none of the children should be intrusted to any persons who seemed likely, either from old age or from slender means, or from nearer and more personal responsibilities, to be under the necessity of devolving the trust, sooner or later, upon strangers who might have none of that interest in the children which attached, in the minds of the Grasmere people, to the circumstances that made them orphans. Two twins, who had naturally played together and slept together from their birth, passed into the same family: the others were dispersed; but into such kind-hearted and intelligent families, with continued opportunities of meeting each other on errands, or at church, or at sales, that it was hard to say which had the more comfortable home. And thus, in so brief a period as one fortnight, a household that, by health and strength, by the humility of poverty and by innocence of life, seemed sheltered from all attacks but those of time, came to be utterly broken up. George and Sarah Green slept in Grasmere churchyard, never more to know the want of "sun or guiding star." Their children were scattered over wealthier houses than those of their poor parents, through the Vales of Grasmere or Rydal; and Blentarn Ghyll, after being shut up for a season, and ceasing for months to send up its little slender column of smoke at morning and evening, finally passed into the hands of a stranger.

The Wordsworths, meantime, acknowledged a peculiar interest in the future fortunes and education of the children. They had taken by much the foremost place in pushing the subscriptions on behalf of the family,—feeling, no doubt, that, when both parents, in any little sequestered community like that of Grasmere, are suddenly cut off by a tragical death, the children in such a case devolve by a sort of natural right and providential bequest on the other members of this community. They energetically applied themselves to the task of raising funds by subscription; most of which, it is true, might not be wanted until future years should carry one after another of the children successively into different trades or occupations; but they well understood that more by tenfold would be raised under an imme-

diate appeal to the sympathies of men whilst yet burning fervently towards the sufferers in this calamity than if the application were delayed until the money should be needed. The Royal Family were made acquainted with the details of the case<sup>1</sup>; they were powerfully affected by the story, especially by the account of little Agnes, and her premature assumption of the maternal character; and they contributed most munificently. Her Majesty, and three at least of her august daughters, were amongst the subscribers to the fund. For my part, I could have obtained a good deal from the careless liberality of Oxonian friends towards such a fund. But, knowing previously how little, in such an application, it would aid me to plead the name of Wordsworth as the founder of the subscription (a name that *now* would stand good for some thousands of pounds in that same Oxford: so passes the injustice, as well as the glory, of this world!)—knowing this, I did not choose to trouble anybody; and the more so, as Miss Wordsworth, upon my proposal to write to various ladies upon whom I could have relied for their several contributions, wrote back to me desiring that I would not, and upon this satisfactory reason—that the fund had already swelled, under the Royal patronage, and the interest excited by so much of the circumstances as could be reported in hurried letters, to an amount beyond what was likely to be wanted for persons whom there was no good reason for pushing out of the sphere to which their birth had called them. The parish even was liable to give aid; and, in the midst of Royal bounty, this aid was not declined. Perhaps this was so far a solitary and unique case that it might be the only one in which some parochial Mr. Bumble found himself pulling in joint harness with the denizens of Windsor Castle, and a coadjutor of “Majesties” and “Royal Highnesses.” Finally, to complete their own large share in the charity, the Wordsworths took into their own family one of the children, a girl: the least amiable, I believe, of the whole; slothful and sensual; so, at least, I imagined; for this girl it was, that in years to come caused by her criminal negligence the death of little Kate Wordsworth.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See footnote *ante*, p. 126.—M.

<sup>2</sup> In the original paper in *Tail's Magazine* the words were:—“a



From a gathering of years far ahead of the events, looking back by accident to this whole little cottage romance of Blentarn Ghyll, with its ups and downs, its lights and shadows, and its fitful alternations of grandeur derived from mountain solitude and of humility derived from the very lowliest poverty,—its little faithful Agnes keeping up her records of time in harmony with the mighty world outside, and feeding the single cow, the total “estate” of the new-made orphans,—I thought of that beautiful Persian apologue where some slender drop or crystallizing filament within the shell of an oyster fancies itself called upon to bewail its own obscure lot, consigned apparently and irretrievably to the gloomiest depths of the Persian Gulf. But changes happen; good and bad luck will fall out, even in the darkest depths of the Persian Gulf; and messages of joy can reach those that wait in silence, even where no post-horn has ever sounded. Behold! the slender filament has ripened into the most glorious of pearls. In a happy hour for himself, some diver from the blossoming forests of Ceylon brings up to heavenly light the matchless pearl; and very soon that solitary crystal drop, that had bemoaned its own obscure lot, finds itself glorifying the central cluster in the tiara bound upon the brow of him who signed himself “King of Kings,” the Shah of Persia, and that shook all Asia from the Indus to the Euphrates. Not otherwise was the lot of little Agnes: faithful to duties so suddenly revealed amidst terrors ghostly as well as earthly; paying down her first tribute of tears to an affliction that seemed past all relief, and such that at first she, with her brothers and sisters, seemed foundering simultaneously with her parents in one mighty darkness. And yet, because, under the strange responsibilities which had suddenly surprised her, she sought counsel and strength from

“girl; Sarah by name; the least amiable, I believe, of the whole; so at least I imagined; for this girl it was, and her criminal negligence, that in years to come inflicted the first heavy wound that I sustained in my affections, and first caused me to drink deeply from the cup of grief.”—Little Kate Wordsworth, the poet's daughter, was a special favourite of De Quincey, whom she used in her childish prattle to call “Kinsey”; and her death, on the 4th June 1812, when De Quincey was on a visit to London, affected him greatly. See the circumstances more in detail, *ante*, Vol. II, pp. 440-445.—M.

God, teaching her brothers and sisters to do the same, and seemed (when alone at midnight) to hear her mother's voice calling to her from the hills above, one moon had scarcely finished its circuit before the most august ladies on our planet were reading, with sympathizing tears, of Agnes Green, and from the towers of Windsor Castle came gracious messages of inquiry to little, lowly Blentarn Ghyll.<sup>1</sup>

In taking leave of this subject I may mention, by the way, that accidents of this nature are not by any means so uncommon in the mountainous districts of Cumberland and Westmorland as the reader might infer from the intensity of the excitement which waited on the catastrophe of the Greens. In that instance it was not the simple death by cold upon the hills, but the surrounding circumstances, which invested the case with its agitating power. The fellowship in death of a wife and husband ; the general impression that the husband had perished in his generous devotion to his wife (a duty, certainly, and no more than a duty, but still, under the instincts of self-preservation, a generous duty) ; sympathy with their long agony, as expressed by their long ramblings, and the earnestness of their efforts to recover their home ; awe for the long concealment which rested upon their fate ; and pity for the helpless condition of the children, —so young and so instantaneously made desolate, and so nearly perishing through the loneliness of their situation, co-operating with stress of weather, had they not been saved by the prudence and timely exertions of a little girl not much above eight years old ;—these were the circumstances and necessary adjuncts of the story which pointed and sharpened the public feelings on that occasion. Else the mere general case of perishing upon the mountains is not, unfortunately, so rare, in *any* season of the year, as for itself alone to command a powerful tribute of sorrow from the public mind. Natives as well as strangers, shepherds as well as tourists, have fallen victims, even in summer, to the misleading and confounding effects of deep mists. Sometimes they have continued to wander unconsciously in a small circle of two or three miles, never coming within hail of a human dwelling until ex-

<sup>1</sup> The whole of this paragraph is an addition in the reprint. —M.

haustion has forced them into a sleep which has proved their last. Sometimes a sprain or injury, that disabled a foot or leg, has destined them to die by the shocking death of hunger.<sup>1</sup> Sometimes a fall from the summit of awful precipices has dismissed them from the anguish of perplexity in

<sup>1</sup> The case of Mr. Gough, who perished in the bosom of Helvellyn [1805], and was supposed by some to have been disabled by a sprain of the ankle, whilst others believed him to have received that injury and his death simultaneously in a fall from the lower shelf of a precipice, became well known to the public, in all its details, through the accident of having been recorded in verse by two writers nearly at the same time, viz. Sir Walter Scott and Wordsworth [by Scott in stanzas entitled "Helvellyn" and by Wordsworth in lines called "Fidelity"—M.] But here, again, as in the case of the Greens, it was not the naked fact of his death amongst the solitudes of the mountains that would have won the public attention, or have obtained the honour of a metrical commemoration. Indeed, to say the truth, the general sympathy with this tragic event was not derived chiefly from the unhappy tourist's melancholy end; for that was too shocking to be even hinted at by either of the two writers (in fact, there was too much reason to fear that it had been the lingering death of famine). Not the personal sufferings of the principal figure in the little drama, but the sublime and mysterious fidelity of the secondary figure, his dog: this it was which won the imperishable remembrance of the vales, and which accounted for the profound interest that immediately gathered round the incidents—an interest that still continues to hallow the memory of the dog. Not the dog of Athens, nor the dog of Pompeii, so well deserve the immortality of history or verse.—Mr. Gough was a young man, belonging to the Society of Friends, who took an interest in the mountain scenery of the Lake district, both as a lover of the picturesque and as a man of science. It was in this latter character, I believe, that he had ascended Helvellyn at the time when he met his melancholy end. From his familiarity with the ground—for he had been an annual visitant to the Lakes—he slighted the usual precaution of taking a guide. Mist, unfortunately, impenetrable volumes of mist, came floating over (as so often they do) from the gloomy fells that compose a common centre for Easedale, Langdale, Eskdale, Borrowdale, Wastdale, Gatesgarthdale (pronounced Keskadale), and Ennerdale. Ten or fifteen minutes afford ample time for this aerial navigation: within that short interval, sunlight, moonlight, starlight, alike disappear; all paths are lost; vast precipices are concealed, or filled up by treacherous draperies of vapour; the points of the compass are irrecoverably confounded; and one vast cloud, too often the cloud of death even to the experienced shepherd, sits like a vast pavilion upon the summits and gloomy coves of Helvellyn. Mr. Gough ought to have allowed for this not unfrequent accident, and for its bewildering effects; under which all local knowledge (even that of shepherds)

the extreme, from the conflicts of hope and fear, by dismissing them at once from life. Sometimes, also, the mountainous solitudes have been made the scenes of remarkable suicides.

In particular, there was a case, a little before I came into the country, of a studious and meditative young boy, who found no pleasure but in books and the search after knowledge. He

becomes in an instant unavailing. What was the course and succession of his dismal adventures after he became hidden from the world by the vapoury screen could not be fully deciphered even by the most sagacious of mountaineers, although in most cases they manifest an Indian truth of eye, together with an Indian felicity of weaving all the signs that the eye can gather into a significant tale by connecting links of judgment and natural inference, especially where the whole case ranges within certain known limits of time and of space. But in this case two accidents forbade the application of their customary skill to the circumstances. One was the want of snow at the time to receive the impression of his feet; the other, the unusual length of time through which his remains lay undiscovered. He had made the ascent at the latter end of October,—a season when the final garment of snow which clothes Helvellyn from the setting in of winter to the sunny days of June has frequently not made its appearance. He was not discovered until the following spring, when a shepherd, traversing the coves of Helvellyn or of Fairfield in quest of a stray sheep, was struck by the unusual sound (and its echo from the neighbouring rocks) of a short quick bark, or cry of distress, as if from a dog or young fox. Mr. Gough had not been missed; for those who saw or knew of his ascent from the Wyburn side of the mountain took it for granted that he had fulfilled his intention of descending in the opposite direction into the valley of Patterdale, or into the Duke of Norfolk's deer-park on Ullswater, or possibly into Matteredale, and that he had finally quitted the country by way of Penrith. Having no reason, therefore, to expect a domestic animal in a region so far from human habitations, the shepherd was the more surprised at the sound and its continued iteration. He followed its guiding, and came to a deep hollow, near the awful curtain of rock called *Striding-Edge*. There, at the foot of a tremendous precipice, lay the body of the unfortunate tourist; and, watching by his side, a meagre shadow, literally reduced to a skin and to bones that could be counted (for it is a matter of absolute demonstration that he never could have obtained either food or shelter through his long winter's imprisonment), sat this most faithful of servants—mounting guard upon his master's honoured body, and protecting it (as he *had* done effectually) from all violation by the birds of prey which haunt the central solitudes of Helvellyn:—

“ How nourished through that length of time  
*He* knows who gave that love sublime  
 And sense of loyal duty—great  
 Beyond all human estimate.”

languished with a sort of despairing nympholepsy after intellectual pleasures—for which he felt too well assured that *his* term of allotted time, the short period of years through which his relatives had been willing to support him at St. Bees,<sup>1</sup> was rapidly drawing to an end. In fact, it was just at hand ; and he was sternly required to take a long farewell of the poets and geometricians for whose sublime contemplations he hungered and thirsted. One week was to have transferred him to some huckstering concern, which not in any spirit of pride he ever affected to despise, but which in utter alienation of heart he loathed, as one whom nature, and his own diligent cultivation of the opportunities recently opened to him for a brief season, had dedicated to a far different service. He mused—revolved his situation in his own mind—computed his power to liberate himself from the bondage of dependency—calculated the chances of his ever obtaining this liberation, from change in the position of his family, or revolution in his own fortunes—and, finally, attempted conjecturally to determine the amount of effect which his new and illiberal employments might have upon his own mind in weaning him from his present elevated tasks, and unfitting him for their enjoyment in distant years, when circumstances might again place it in his power to indulge them.

These meditations were in part communicated to a friend, and in part, also, the result to which they brought him. That this result was gloomy his friend knew ; but not, as in the end it appeared, that it was despairing. Such, however, it was ; and, accordingly, having satisfied himself that the chances of a happier destiny were for him slight or none, and having, by a last fruitless effort, ascertained that there was no hope whatever of mollifying his relatives, or of obtaining a year's delay of his sentence, he walked quietly up to the cloudy wildernesses within Blencathara ; read his *Æschylus* (read, perhaps, those very scenes of the “*Prome-*

<sup>1</sup> St. Bees, on the Cumberland coast, where there is a theological college for the education of young men intended for orders in the Church of England. As this was not founded till 1816, De Quincey may refer to the Grammar School, which dates from the sixteenth century.—M.

theus" that pass amidst the wild valleys of the Caucasus, and below the awful summits, untrod by man, of the ancient Elborus); read him for the last time; for the last time fathomed the abyss-like subtleties of his favourite geometer, the mighty Apollonius<sup>1</sup>; for the last time retraced some parts of the narrative, so simple in its natural grandeur, composed by that imperial captain, the most majestic man of ancient history—

"The foremost man of all this world"—

Julius the Dictator, the eldest of the Cæsars. These three authors—Æschylus, Apollonius, and Cæsar—he studied until the daylight waned and the stars began to appear. Then he made a little pile of the three volumes, that served him for a pillow; took a dose, such as he had heard would be sufficient, of laudanum; laid his head upon the monument which he himself seemed in fancy to have raised to the three mighty spirits; and, with his face upturned to the heavens and the stars, slipped quietly away into a sleep upon which no morning ever dawned. The laudanum—whether it were from the effect of the open air, or from some peculiarity of temperament—had not produced sickness in the first stage of its action, nor convulsions in the last. But, from the serenity of his countenance, and from the tranquil maintenance of his original supine position—for his head was still pillowed upon the three intellectual Titans, Greek and Roman, and his eyes were still directed towards the stars—it would appear that he had died placidly, and without a struggle. In this way the imprudent boy,—who, like Chatterton, would not wait for the change that a day might bring,—obtained the liberty he sought. I describe him as doing whatsoever he had described himself in his last conversations as wishing to do; for whatsoever in his last scene of life was not explained by the objects and the arrangement of the objects about him found a sufficient solution in the confidential explanations of his purposes which he had communicated, so far as he felt it safe, to his only friend.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Apollonius, a native of Perga in Pamphylia, and called "the Great Geometer," lived about B.C. 240.—M.

<sup>2</sup> This story has been made the subject of a separate poem, entitled

From this little special episode, where the danger was of a more exceptional kind, let us fall back on the more ordinary case of shepherds, whose duties, in searching after missing sheep, or after sheep surprised by sudden snow-drifts, are too likely, in all seasons of severity, to force them upon facing dangers which, in relation to their natural causes, must for ever remain the same. This uniformity it is, this monotony of the danger, which authorizes our surprise and our indignation that long ago the resources of art and human contrivance, in any one of many possible modes, should not have been applied to the relief of an evil so constantly recurrent. A danger that has no fixed root in our social system suggests its own natural excuse when it happens to be neglected. But this evil is one of frightful ruin when it *does* take effect, and of eternal menace when it does *not*. In some years it has gone near to the depopulation of a whole pastoral hamlet, as respects the most vigorous and hopeful part of its male population; and annually it causes, by its mere contemplation, the heartache to many a young wife and many an anxious mother. In reality, amongst all pastoral districts where the field of their labour lies in mountainous tracts, an allowance is as regularly made for the loss of human life, by mists or storms suddenly enveloping the hills and surprising the shepherds, as for the loss of sheep; some proportion out of each class—shepherds and sheep—is considered as a kind of tithe-offering to the stern Goddess of Calamity, and in the light of a ransom for those who escape. Grahame, the author of “The Sabbath,”

“The Student of St. Bees,” by my friend Mr. James Payn of Cambridge. The volume is published by Macmillan, Cambridge, and contains thoughts of great beauty, too likely to escape the vapid and irreflective reader. [The volume so referred to by De Quincey was published in 1853 with the title “*Poems; by James Payn, Author of Stories from Boccaccio*”; and the particular poem mentioned is a piece of about a hundred lines in heroic couplets. It is a rather remarkable coincidence that in the *Life Drama* of Alexander Smith, which was published also in 1853, there is a passage, almost too daringly powerful, describing a suicide by night on a mountain-top, which one can suppose to have been suggested, just as Mr. Payn’s poem was, by the present incident in De Quincey’s *Lake Reminiscences*. There, however, it is not a scholar, but a poet, that is the victim of the suicidal melancholy.—M.]

says that (confining himself to Scotland) he has known winters in which a single parish lost as many as ten shepherds. And this mention of Grahame reminds me of a useful and feasible plan proposed by him for obviating the main pressure of such sudden perils amidst snow and solitude and night. I call it feasible with good reason; for Grahame, who doubtless had made the calculations, declares that, for so trifling a sum as a few hundred pounds, every square mile in the southern counties of Scotland (that is, I presume, throughout the Lowlands) might be fitted up with his apparatus. He prefaces his plan by one general remark, to which I believe that every mountaineer will assent, viz. that the vast majority of deaths in such cases is owing to the waste of animal power in trying to recover the right direction, and probably it *would* be recovered in a far greater number of instances were the advance persisted in according to any unity of plan. But, partly, the distraction of mind and irresolution under such circumstances cause the wanderer frequently to change his direction voluntarily, according to any new fancy that starts up to beguile him; and, partly, he changes it often insensibly and unconsciously, from the same cause which originally led him astray. Obviously, therefore, the primary object should be to compensate the loss of distinct vision,—which, for the present, is irreparable in that form,—by substituting an appeal to another sense. That error which has been caused by the obstruction of the eye may be corrected by the sounder information of the ear. Let crosses, such as are raised for other purposes in Catholic lands, be planted at intervals—suppose of one mile—in every direction. “Snow-storms,” says Grahame, “are almost always accompanied with wind. Suppose, then, a pole, fifteen feet high, well fixed in the ground, with two cross spars placed near the bottom, to denote the ‘airts’ (or points of the compass): a bell hung at the top of this pole, with a piece of flat wood (attached to it) projecting upwards, would ring with the slightest breeze. As they would be purposely made to have different tones, the shepherd would soon be able to distinguish one from another. He could never be more than a mile from one or other of them. On coming to the spot, he would at



“once know the points of the compass, and, of course, the “direction in which his home lay.”<sup>1</sup> Another protecting circumstance would rise out of the simplicity of manners, which is pretty sure to prevail in a mountainous region, and the pious tenderness universally felt towards those situations of peril which are incident to all alike—men and women, parents and children, the strong and the weak. The crosses, I would answer for it, whenever they are erected, will be protected by a superstition, such as that which in Holland protects the stork. But it would be right to strengthen this feeling by instilling it as a principle of duty in the catechisms of mountainous regions; and perhaps, also, in order to invest this duty with a religious sanctity, at the approach of every winter there might be read from the altar a solemn commination, such as that which the English Church appoints for Ash-Wednesday—“Cursed is he that removeth his neighbour’s landmark,” etc.; to which might now be added, —“Cursed is he that causeth the steps of the wayfarer to go astray, and layeth snares for the wanderer on the hills: cursed is he that removeth the bell from the snow-cross.” And every child might learn to fear a judgment of retribution upon its own steps in case of any such wicked action, by reading the tale of that Scottish sea-rover who, in order

“To plague the Abbot of Aberbrothock,”

removed the bell from the Inchcape Rock; which same rock, in after days, and for want of this very warning bell, inflicted miserable ruin upon himself, his ship, and his crew.<sup>2</sup> Once made sacred from violation, these crosses might afterwards be made subjects of suitable ornament; that is to say, they might be made as picturesque in form, and colour, and

<sup>1</sup> This, I think, is a quotation from Grahame’s note to his poem *A Winter Sabbath Walk*; and in the original article of 1839 it was followed by a longish extract from that poem, and by these words with reference to Grahame’s proposal—“A more useful suggestion “was never made. Many thousands of lives would be saved in each “century by the general adoption of Mr. Grahame’s plan.” The extract from Grahame’s poem, and these words in his praise, were omitted in De Quincey’s reprint of 1854.—M.

<sup>2</sup> Southey’s well-known ballad of Sir Ralph the Rover and the Inchcape Rock.—M.

material, as the crosses of Alpine countries or the guide-posts of England often are. The associated circumstances of storm and solitude, of winter, of night, and wayfaring, would give dignity to almost any form which had become familiar to the eye as the one appropriated to this purpose; and the particular form of a cross or crucifix, besides its own beauty, would suggest to the mind a pensive allegoric memorial of that spiritual asylum offered by the same emblem to the poor erring roamer in our human pilgrimage, whose steps are beset with other snares, and whose heart is bewildered by another darkness and another storm,—by the darkness of guilt, or by the storm of affliction.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The original concluding paragraph of the paper in the Magazine article of 1839 had been about three times as long as that which De Quincey retained in 1854,—including, indeed, all that he then retained, but consisting for the rest of a frittter of remarks towards a practical modification of the poet Grahame's plan for preventing the deaths of travellers among hills or moors in snow-storms. De Quincey thought (1) that the storm-crosses proposed by Grahame might be useful even if, to save expense, they were placed at intervals of four miles instead of one, inasmuch as a traveller would then be always within two miles of one of them, and the wind would carry the sound of a bell that distance, (2) that the crosses might be made of cast-iron, (3) that each cross might be provided with a little box or cell, elevated about eight feet from the ground, accessible by a ladder, and capable of containing one person, (4) that it would not be amiss if, after the sanctity of the crosses had been sufficiently established to protect them from theft, a small supply of brandy and biscuits were lodged in each cell or box at the beginning of every winter, with a few rockets and matches for lighting them. "If iron were too costly," he adds, "it might be used only for the little cell; and the rest of "the structure might be composed with no expense at all, except the "labour (and that would generally be given by public contribution "from the neighbourhood), from the rude undressed stones which "are always found lying about in such situations, and which are so "sufficient for all purposes of strength that the field-walls, and by "far the greater number of the dwelling-houses, in Westmorland, "are built of such materials, and, until late years, without mortar." To this mention of the novelty of the use of mortar in Westmorland in such cases De Quincey could not resist subjoining a footnote, as follows:—"This recent change in the art of rustic masonry by the "adoption of mortar does not mark any advance in that art, but, on "the contrary, a decay of skill and care. Twenty years ago [1819], "when 'dry' walls were in general use except for a superior class of "houses, it was necessary to supply the want of mortar by a much "nicer adaptation of the stones to each other. But now this care is

“regarded as quite superfluous; for the largest gaps and cavities  
“amongst the stones are filled up with mortar; meantime, the walls  
“built in this way are not so impervious either to rain or wind as  
“those built upon the old patent construction of the past generation.”  
—All this is interesting enough; but De Quincey, when he reprinted  
the EARLY MEMORIALS OF GRASMERE in 1854, showed artistic tact in  
sweeping it all away, and closing a paper of this kind poetically and  
musically, rather than with a bristle of such mechanical minutiae.  
—M.

## ANALECT FROM RICHTER

### DREAM UPON THE UNIVERSE

I had been reading an excellent dissertation of Krüger's upon the old vulgar error which regards the space from one earth and sun to another as empty. Our sun, together with all its planets, fills only the 31,419,460,000,000,000th part of the whole space between itself and the next solar body. Gracious Heavens! thought I, in what an unfathomable abyss of emptiness were this universe swallowed up and lost, if all were void and utter vacuity except the few shining points of dust which we call a planetary system! To conceive of our earthly ocean as the abode of death and essentially incapable of life, and of its populous islands as being no greater than snail-shells, would be a far less error in proportion to the compass of our planet than that which attributes emptiness to the great mundane spaces; and the error would be far less if the marine animals were to ascribe life and fulness exclusively to the sea, and to regard the atmospheric ocean above them as empty and untenanted. According to Herschel, the most remote of the galaxies which the telescope discovers lie at such a distance from us that their light, which reaches us at this day, must have set out on its journey two millions of years ago; and thus by optical laws it is possible that whole squadrons of the starry hosts may be now reaching us with their beams which have themselves perished ages ago. Upon this scale of computation for the dimensions of the world, what heights and depths and breadths must there be in this universe—in comparison of which the positive universe would be itself a nihility, were it crossed, pierced, and belted about by so illimitable a wilderness of nothing! But is it possible that any man can for a moment overlook those vast forces which must pervade these imaginary deserts with eternal surges of flux and reflux to make the very paths to those distant starry coasts voyageable to our eyes? Can you lock up in a sun or in its planets their reciprocal forces of attraction? Does not the light stream through the immeasurable spaces between our earth and the nebula which is furthest removed from us? And in this stream of light there is as ample an existence of the positive, and as much a home for the abode of a spiritual world, as there is a dwelling-place for thy own spirit in the substance of the brain. To these and similar reflections succeeded the following dream:—

Methought my body sank down in ruins, and my inner form stepped out apparelled in light; and by my side there stood another

form which resembled my own, except that it did not shine like mine, but lightened unceasingly. "Two thoughts," said the Form, "are the wings with which I move: the thought of *Here*, and the thought of *There*. And, behold! I am yonder,"—pointing to a distant world. "Come, then, and wait on me with thy thoughts and with thy flight, that I may show to thee the Universe under a veil." And I flew along with the Form. In a moment our Earth fell back, behind our consuming flight, into an abyss of distance; a faint gleam only was reflected from the summits of the Cordilleras, and a few moments more reduced the sun to a little star; and soon there remained nothing visible of our system except a comet, which was travelling from our sun with angelic speed in the direction of Sirius. Our flight now carried us so rapidly through the flocks of solar bodies—flocks past counting, unless to their heavenly Shepherd—that scarcely could they expand themselves before us into the magnitude of moons before they sank behind us into pale nebular gleams; and their planetary earths could not reveal themselves for a moment to the transcendent rapidity of our course. At length Sirius and all the brotherhood of our constellations and the galaxy of our heavens stood far below our feet as a little nebula amongst other yet more distant nebulae. Thus we flew on through the starry wildernesses: one heaven after another unfurled its immeasurable banners before us, and then rolled up behind us: galaxy behind galaxy towered up into solemn altitudes before which the spirit shuddered; and they stood in long array through which the Infinite Being might pass in progress. Sometimes the Form that lightened would outfly my weary thoughts; and then it would be seen far off before me like a coruscation amongst the stars—till suddenly I thought again to myself the thought of *There*, and then I was at its side. But, as we were thus swallowed up by one abyss of stars after another, and the heavens above our eyes were not emptier, neither were the heavens below them fuller,—and as suns without intermission fell into the solar ocean like waterspouts of a storm which fall into the ocean of waters,—then at length the human heart within me was overburdened and weary, and yearned after some narrow cell or quiet oratory in this metropolitan cathedral of the Universe. And I said to the Form at my side, "O Spirit! has then this Universe no end?" And the Form answered and said, "Lo! it has no beginning."

Suddenly, however, the heavens above us appeared to be emptied, and not a star was seen to twinkle in the mighty abyss,—no gleam of light to break the unity of the infinite darkness. The starry hosts behind us had all contracted into an obscure nebula; and at length *that* also had vanished. And I thought to myself, "At last the Universe has ended": and I trembled at the thought of the illimitable dungeon of pure, pure darkness which here began to imprison the Creation. I shuddered at the dead sea of nothing, in whose unfathomable zone of blackness the jewel of the glittering universe seemed to be set and buried for ever; and through the night in which we moved I saw the Form,—which still lightened as before, but left all around it unilluminated. Then the Form said to me in my anguish

—"O creature of little faith! Look up! the most ancient light is coming!" I looked; and in a moment came a twilight—in the twinkling of an eye a galaxy—and then with a choral burst rushed in all the company of stars. For centuries grey with age, for millennia hoary with antiquity, had the starry light been on its road to us; and at length out of heights inaccessible to thought it had reached us. Now then, as through some renovated century, we flew through new cycles of heavens. At length again came a starless interval; and far longer it endured before the beams of a starry host again had reached us.

As we thus advanced for ever through an interchange of nights and solar heavens, and as the interval grew still longer and longer before the last heaven we had quitted contracted to a point, all at once we issued suddenly from the middle of thickest night into an Aurora Borealis, the herald of an expiring world, and we found throughout this cycle of solar systems that a day of judgment had indeed arrived. The suns had sickened, and the planets were heaving—rocking, yawning in convulsions; the subterraneous waters of the great deeps were breaking up, and lightnings that were ten diameters of a world in length ran along, from east to west, from zenith to nadir; and here and there, where a sun should have been, we saw instead through the misty vapour a gloomy, ashy, leaden corpse of a solar body, that sucked in flames from the perishing world, but gave out neither light nor heat; and, as I saw, through a vista which had no end, mountain towering above mountain, and piled up with what seemed glittering snow from the conflict of solar and planetary bodies, then my spirit bent under the load of the Universe, and I said to the Form, "Rest, rest; and lead me no farther: I am too solitary in the creation itself, and in its deserts yet more so; the full world is great, but the empty world is greater, and with the Universe increase its Zaarahs."

Then the Form touched me like the flowing of a breath, and spoke more gently than before:—"In the presence of God there is no emptiness: above, below, between, and round about the stars, in the darkness and in the light, dwelleth the true and very Universe, the sun and fountain of all that is. But thy spirit can bear only earthly images of the unearthly: now then I cleanse thy sight with euphrasy; look forth, and behold the images." Immediately my eyes were opened; and I looked, and I saw as it were an interminable sea of light—sea immeasurable, sea unfathomable, sea without a shore. All spaces between all heavens were filled with happiest light, and there was a thundering of floods, and there were seas above the seas and seas below the seas; and I saw all the trackless regions that we had voyaged over; and my eye comprehended the farthest and the nearest; and darkness had become light, and the light darkness: for the deserts and wastes of the creation were now filled with the sea of light, and in this sea the suns floated like ash-grey blossoms and the planets like black grains of seed. Then my heart comprehended that immortality dwelled in the spaces between the worlds, and death only amongst the worlds. Upon all the suns there walked upright

shadows in the form of men ; but they were glorified when they quitted these perishable worlds and when they sank into the sea of light ; and the murky planets, I perceived, were but cradles for the infant spirits of the Universe of Light. In the Zaarahs of the Creation I saw, I heard, I felt the glittering, the echoing, the breathing, of life and creative power. The suns were but as spinning-wheels, the planets no more than weavers' shuttles, in relation to the infinite web which composes the veil of Isis,<sup>1</sup>—which veil is hung over the whole creation, and lengthens as any finite being attempts to raise it. And in sight of this immeasurability of life no sadness could endure, but only joy that knew no limit, and happy prayers.

But in the midst of this great Vision of the Universe the Form that lightened eternally had become invisible, or had vanished to its home in the unseen world of spirits. I was left alone in the centre of a universe of life, and I yearned after some sympathizing being. Suddenly from the starry depths there came floating through the ocean of light a planetary body ; and upon it there stood a woman whose face was as the face of a Madonna ; and by her side there stood a Child ; whose countenance varied not, neither was it magnified as he drew nearer. This Child was a King, for I saw that he had a crown upon his head : but the crown was a crown of thorns. Then also I perceived that the planetary body was our unhappy Earth ; and, as the Earth drew near, this Child who had come forth from the starry deeps to comfort me threw upon me a look of gentlest pity and of unutterable love, so that in my heart I had a sudden rapture of joy such as passes all understanding ; and I awoke in the tumult of my happiness.

I awoke ; but my happiness survived my dreams, and I exclaimed—Oh ! how beautiful is Death, seeing that we die in a world of life and of creation without end ! and I blessed God for my life upon Earth, but much more for the life in those unseen depths of the Universe which are emptied of all but the Supreme Reality, and where no earthly life nor perishable hope can enter.

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<sup>1</sup> On this antique mode of symbolizing the mysterious Nature which is at the heart of all things and connects all things into one whole, possibly the reader may feel not unwilling to concur with Kant's remark at page 197 of his *Critik der Urtheilskraft* : "Perhaps in all human composition there is no passage of greater sublimity, nor amongst all sublime thoughts any which has been more suitably expressed, than that which occurs in the inscription upon the temple of Isis (the Great Mother, Nature) : *I am whatsoever is, whatsoever has been, whatsoever shall be ; and the veil which is over my countenance no mortal hand has ever raised.*"

## ADDITIONAL NOTES

P. 66. Quicherat, quoted in Professor Masson's note, appears to be still the great authority on Joan of Arc. There is also Wallon, *Jeanne d'Arc*, 2 vols., Paris, 1875. See also the brief but admirable account in J. R. Green's *Short History of the English People*.

P. 68. François Villon, in his "Ballade des dames du temps jadis," agrees with De Quincey, calling her "Jehanne la bonne Lorraine."

P. 81. On De Quincey's account of the trial, Mr. C. H. Spence kindly sends me the following note:—"As regards her murder, De Quincey does not emphasise sufficiently (a) the *religious*, not *political*, hatred the Church had for her; (b) that her patriotism was quite foreign and disturbing to feudal society; (c) that the king of France, though he had Talbot in his hands, sent neither a letter nor a lance to ransom or rescue the maiden."

P. 95. "*The child is father*," etc.—Wordsworth, in the lines beginning "My heart leaps up when I behold."

P. 96. "*Think you, 'mid all*," etc.—The two stanzas are from the poem, "Expostulation and Reply," beginning "Why, William, on that old grey stone."

P. 97. "*Books lying open*," etc.—De Quincey doubtless quoted from memory. The actual line is "Bibles laid open, millions of surprises." It occurs in G. Herbert's fine sonnet, "Lord, with what care hast Thou begirt us round."

P. 97. *Daughter of a voice*.—So Wordsworth, "Ode to Duty," calls Duty "stern daughter of the voice of God."

P. 98. *Sortes Virgilianæ*.—The mediæval belief in Virgil as a magician is fully described in Professor Comparetti's *Virgil in the Middle Ages*, translated by Benecke (London, 1895).

P. 99. *Pariah slave*.—"No reader of De Quincey but must have observed how frequent and important a word in his vocabulary is the word 'Pariah,' meaning 'social outcast,' and what a hold had been taken of his imagination by the idea that an immense proportion of the men and women of the world, in all ages and all lands, had belonged to the class of Pariahs, the socially outcast for one reason or another, the despised, the unrespectable, the maltreated and down-trodden" (Professor Masson, *Life of De Quincey*, p. 13).

P. 104. *Greenhay*, the country house, just outside Manchester, where most of De Quincey's childhood was spent. He was not born here, but in Manchester itself (1785). "Greenhay" was built by his father in 1791 or 1792, and the name was an invention of his mother's. The modern suburb "Greenheys" seems to be called after the house, which is no longer standing.



## SUBJECTS FOR ESSAYS

[The following list of subjects is added in the hope that it may be found useful for practice in composition. It is not intended that the essays should be written in direct imitation of De Quincey's style, but the reading of De Quincey's essay will in each case give some help towards the right treatment of the theme.]

### *The English Mail-Coach*

1. The humour and pathos of travelling. (See also the references to other passages in De Quincey, Introduction, p. xv.)
2. The reflections of a passenger by the night-mail from London to Edinburgh, A.D. 1900.
3. Did "romance" go out with the stage-coach? (Cp. Rudyard Kipling's ballad of "Romance" in *The Seven Seas*.)
4. "The glory of motion," as enjoyed on a bicycle tour.

### *Joan of Arc*

5. The education of Joan of Arc compared with that of a modern English girl (p. 71).
6. The true greatness of woman (p. 84). (Cp. Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies*, Lecture II., "Of Queens' Gardens.")
7. "A great scholar. . . . Not one who depends simply on an infinite memory, but also on an infinite and electrical power of combination" (p. 84). Explain De Quincey's definition, and contrast the pedant (*e.g.* Dominie Sampson, or Casaubon in *Middlemarch*) with the true scholar.
8. "The magnanimity and justice of enemies" (p. 66). Give some notable instances from your own reading.
9. The charm and mystery of forests (p. 72).

### *Infant Literature*

10. The favourite books of your childhood, and why you liked them.
11. The opening scenes of Shakespeare's great tragedies: how far they prepare us for what is to follow.
12. A noble revenge: illustrate from history or from fiction.

*On the Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth*

13. "Such a murderer as a poet will condescend to" (p. 111). What are the conditions that render a murder a fit theme for a tragedy? Illustrate from Shakespeare.

14. The difference between sympathy and pity (p. 110).

*Early Memorials of Grasmere*

15. The influence of mountains on character. (Cp. Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, Vol. IV.)

16. "Sometimes in the very lowest forms of duty . . . there is nevertheless, the sublimest ascent of self-sacrifice" (p. 132).

17. The life and death of Chatterton (p. 142).

THE END

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